Chapter 3

LIBERATION THEOLOGY:
ITS RELATION TO MARXIST SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the present day church, there are "three principal concurrent theological models in operation". These are the neoscholastic theology, transcendental-idealistic theology and post-idealistic theology. Of the three, the neoscholastic theology is the most dominant; it represents the neoconservative elements in theological speculation and is mainly defensive and traditional in its approach to issues. It is unable to cope with the problems and challenges of the present day world. The transcendental-idealistic school signifies a change in theological approach. It borrows freely from the church fathers and scholastics in trying to meet the challenges posed by existentialism and secularisations. This approach, too, has failed to address effectively the issues relating to the material and social conditions of life in the modern world. It gave way to the post-idealistic school of which liberation theology is the most articulate and active model, especially, in Latin America and Third World countries.

In its analysis of the social phenomena of poverty, oppression, injustice, and the like, liberation theology makes much use of the terms and concepts of
the social sciences, especially, those of Marxist theory and methodology. The new theology has come under heavy fire for its dependence on Marxist terminology and methods, especially, for its controversial stand on violence as a desperate last resort in the struggle for justice. Actually, this theology is mainly seeking to implement Paulo Frier's "conscientization" method which, it must be admitted, had been inspired by the Marxist social philosophy. In this chapter, it is proposed to examine liberation theology's connection to Marxism, so as to bring out not only the points of convergence but points of divergence as well in their approach to social problems.

Marxism is a highly influential social philosophy which claims to be able to give adequate and accurate explanations of the meaning of life, of human nature and human destiny, of history and of the world. These explanations are asserted to be "scientific" as opposed to the merely speculative explanations offered by Utopian socialism and metaphysical philosophy. Whether it is possible to use some aspect of Marxist analysis without accepting the Marxist ideology in its totality is a hotly debated question. One of the main criticisms against the theology of liberation is that it uses Marxist concepts and categories as the "determining" principle of its own theology and, so, is in the danger of ceasing to be christian.

Features Common to Both Marxism and Christianity

Marxism and Christianity seem to share a number of common factors — a correspondence not to be found between other ideologies and religions.
a) Liberation as transformation of this world

In religions like Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, ultimate liberation or salvation is conceived as liberation from the body and from the world. But Christianity and Marxism envisage ultimate liberation as a transformation of this world. As Marx has put it conspicuously: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it”.3

b) Liberation: a commitment to one’s fellow humans

Christianity and Marxism focus on the close inter-relationship of individuals within the society.4 The individual is constituted by a labyrinth of relationships. Salvation or liberation is determined by what one does or refuses to do to one’s fellows in the community. Marxism proclaims man as a being occupying the highest order of life and consciousness and so makes it imperative to overthrow all relations that debase and enslave him.

c) Liberation aimed at a ‘new nature’

Marxism’s ambition is to produce a new human being in the context of the classless society which is its declared goal. Christianity, too, envisages a new human being and a new society to be initiated by conversion to Jesus Christ. Christianity aims at a radical conversion of the kind that issues in a “new nature” (Colo 3: 10). In general, Marxism and Christianity may be said to aim at a common goal — the “total fulfilment of the human being”.5 Marxism strives for a “new conversion of human kind”, the Bible also aspires to the creation of a “new type of human kind”.6
d) **Theory and praxis and the option for the poor**

In Marxism as in liberation theology there is integration of theory and praxis which sets them apart from most conventional philosophies and theologies. Marxism turned philosophy into an instrument of social change and a weapon for the proletariat in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. According to Marx, "philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat and the proletariat cannot be abolished without the philosophy being made a reality". The focus of liberation theology is on the "option for the poor and the liberation praxis", which, it is hoped, will effect radical structural changes in favour of the poor through their own initiatives and struggles.

Although the convergence between liberation theology and Marxism is important and striking and touches some of the essentials of idea and attitude, the divergences are none the less significant. Far too often, attention has been drawn to the common features, to the neglect of the sharper and more conspicuous points of divergence. Clodovis Boff has effectively countered the criticism that any transaction with Marxism on the basis of common elements is likely to prove disastrous because of its underlying ideology: "Certainly, Marxism is dangerous, but obviously also useful . . . Just because a tool is dangerous, one need not put it away . . ."

**The Marxian Worldview**

As an influential worldview of modern times, Marxism:

(a) projects a unified vision of world history and the reality as making up a single, yet vast, continuum of the evolutionary process.
(b) focuses attention on the human being as a worker placed in productive relations with others and, hence, deserving of respect and dignity due to his crucial role in society,\(^{11}\)

(c) is addressed to modern society where the worker feels alienated by technological and industrial civilisation from the productive process and the fruits of his labour,\(^{12}\)

(d) offers not just a theory of social transformation but formulates concrete plans of action. Its philosophy is a clarion call for revolutionary action and holds out the hope of liberation for workers of the whole world.

Marx was deeply moved by the plight of the working class whom he described as a "cheaper commodity"\(^{13}\) than the goods produced and wanted to lead them from bondage to freedom. There are people who see a striking similarity between the Christian concept of the kingdom of God and the Marxist vision of the classless society. As a result, Christians have ranged themselves in two opposite camps — those for and those against Marxism. On the one side, there are those who call for a dialogue with this powerful ideology since it contains an important message for the world today and helps the Christians to reread the Bible from a different perspective. Others, like Jehovah's witnesses, see Communism as the manifestation of the anti-Christ — the embodiment of evil — in history, as the most dangerous kind of energy currently confronting the human kind.

**Marx's Concept of the Person**

Marx's philosophy of man finds its most articulate expression in the "economic and philosophical manuscripts".\(^{14}\) Here, he discusses the existence of
the “real individual,” who he “is”, what he “is” and how his nature unfolds in
history. Marx sees man as a member of a society, of a given class, aided by the
society and at the same time “captive” of it. Marxist philosophy, according to
Erich Fromm, is a “protest against man’s alienation, his loss of himself and his
transformation into a thing”.
Marx’s concept of man is, at once, a protest against the debasement of man and an affirmation of faith in man’s capacity to
liberate himself and realise his destiny as a fulfilled human person.

From Feuerbach Marx took the idea that God is nothing but the
“projection” of the infinite potentialities of man and that all powers thus
projected, actually, belong to mankind. He gives to man the place once
occupied by God. Through negation of God’s existence, Marx was trying to
assert the existence and the independence of man.

According to John Plamentaz, Marx’s man is a self-conscious and
progressive being who develops himself in intercourse with other human beings.
In other words, man is “self-creative” and “liable to alienation wherever the
social causes of alienation operate”. Marx praises Hegel for understanding
better than any other philosophers the two closely connected facts about
man — he is “self-creative” and is necessarily subject to “alienation”. Man is
the product of his own labour; he becomes properly human by his own
activities. Man is also a “suffering being”, a being for himself and a “human
natural being”.

For Marx, a human person is “essentially a worker and “ . . . is simply a
worker”. What makes a human being different from all other beings is the
capacity for the kind of activity which we call work. It is through work and in
work that one is linked to nature. A human being is able to act on nature, to
transform it into a new form as earth into field, etc. This is the process of humanising nature, to live on it, to provide for oneself food, shelter, clothing and so on is, thus, to transform oneself. Thus, the human person, as Marx learnt from Hegel, is not a "given" but a "task".

The human individual is a social being and one’s life is a manifestation and affirmation of social life. Marx explains this by an example. He says that when he engages in research he is doing a social, human act. Though the research is not done in direct association with any other man, he is doing a social human act since the language he uses is given to him as a social product. So, Marx concludes, “my own existence is a social activity and what I produce I produce for the society, and with the consciousness of acting as a social being”. In Marx’s view, history is the begetting of the human person through labour. The production of material life itself is the first historical act. The quest for the basic needs — food, shelter and clothing — and for self-sufficiency is a person’s call for all the time. In his opinion, “the whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour”.

Pope John Paul II opens his encyclical on human work thus: “Work is one of the characteristics that distinguishes man from the rest of creatures . . . Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity . . . In a sense, it constitutes its very nature”. It shows that the church accepts work as a distinguishing factor that transforms man. Work relates a person to nature and also places the individual in a network of relationships with fellow humans. An individual lives as a member of a social group which works as a unit to provide for the necessities of life. Work welds together local communities into a social
“work force” in which each works for the good of all. Work makes one a fellow human being. By nature, an individual is a member of a work-force.

Instruments or tools enable one to perform one's work more effectively. The invention of tools marks a turning point in man's struggle with nature. It indicates a development of consciousness since it implies the power to see a "means" in relation to an "end". Conversely, consciousness itself develops in response to the work environment. This led Marx to his important assertion that consciousness is determined by life, by the way one lives and works, and not the other way about. The way one works determines the way one thinks; in other words, thought must be judged in relation to work. This is tantamount to saying that theory is born out of practice and must always be seen as leading to practice.

In the social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life. It is not the consciousness of man that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.25
In Marx's opinion, it is not ideas that condition or determine reality; it is the economic factor that creates ideas: "The prevailing material circumstances and the means of production determine essentially the social situation and the ruling ideas of any epoch." It must be pointed out that Marx did not deny the influence of ideas altogether but considered all social relationships secondary to the economic factor:

The political, legal, philosophical, literary and artistic development rests on the economic base. But they all react upon one another and upon the economic base. It is not the case that the economic situation is the sole active cause and that everything else is merely a passive effect, there is, rather, a reciprocity within a field of economic necessity which in the last instance always asserts itself. . . Among . . . relationships, the economic — however much they may be influenced by political and ideological relationships — are still ultimately the decisive ones . . .

According to Marx, in the last analysis, the technico-economic factor determines the evolution of societies and of human beings. On this view, it is no longer politics, religion, culture or anything else but the economic forces, the modes of production of goods and services by the work of human beings that holds the key to the role of the individual and the goals of society. That this is a boldly original attempt to re-read history will be readily admitted. The Marxian view does contain an element of truth in that it highlights the material conditions of human life; however it would be simplistic to reduce the whole complex of evolutionary forces to the economic base. Marxian theory offers itself as an
explanation of history but its pretension to privileged status among theories of history will not go unchallenged.

**Marxism and Class Theory**

Without denying the creativity of the individual human person, Marx maintains that man is, first of all, a social being. The "social beingness" takes precedence over the individual aspects. Marx reversed the prevailing doctrine of individualism of the nineteenth century. Society itself is a natural phenomenon, an organic process which develops and evolves by reciprocal action in and through an everlasting struggle between classes. *The Communist Manifesto* explains the process succinctly:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Free man and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-construction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.²³

According to Marx, there would always be struggle between the classes rather than rational co-operation in order to control the means of production.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones... society as a whole is more and
more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes
directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.29

Marx believes that the class struggle in the modern period is simpler than the
earlier class struggles because of the greater polarisation of the society into two
great hostile camps or classes: the bourgeoisie30 and the proletariat.

The division of society into classes gives rise to different political, ethical,
philosophical and religious views of the world. These views reflect the current
class relations and tend either to consolidate or to undermine the power and
authority of the dominant class. “The ideas of the ruling class are in every age
the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the dominant material force in society is at
the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of
material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of
mental production”.31

Human society from the very beginning has remained fundamentally
divided into classes which often clash in pursuit of their own interests. According
to Marx-Engels, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class
struggles”.32 Unequal access to material resources and power in society does not
necessary lead to class struggle. But the potential for class struggle is inherent in
every differentiated society since it generates conflicts of interest between persons
and groups differently located within the social structures. “Class”, according to
Lenin, “is a social group which in virtue of its position in the process of
production has a common economic, social and political interest which is
opposed to the economic, social and political interest of the other groups”.33 A
class is not a class but only a segment of society until it is conscious of being a
class. "Class consciousness" arises only when it is aware of its interests through its conflict with other classes. Thus it becomes the real agent of change.

Marx explains it thus:

. . . in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that, consequently, the whole history of human kind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; that the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class — the proletariat — cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and the ruling class — the bourgeoisie — without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction and class struggles.34

According to Marx, socialism is a stage of historical development which will dislodge capitalism. It will not come automatically; but the oppressed classes must work together to bring it about through revolutionary action. Real social change, says Marx, can be brought about only by economic forces. However, economic forces by themselves do not carry out revolutions. Only people can revolt; it is people who make history. In order to act, to transform the social structure, people should be conscious of the goals and ends of their revolt and
also arouse discontent and indignation against a definite group of persons or a
system responsible for their misery and oppression. Eric Weil says: "Revolutions
erupt when man is discontent with his discontent". 35

Materialistic Interpretation of History

Marx offers a materialistic interpretation of history. In his view, the
political, intellectual and spiritual activities of men are themselves conditioned by
the productive process and relations within society. This means that economic
forces alone determine history including the history of intellectual and spiritual
activity and determine the laws of our institutions. Contrary to the prevailing
assumption that radical changes in history are brought about by new ideas and
powerful leaders, Marx held that economic forces alone are the decisive factor in
transforming society and altering the course of history. The "modes of
production" gives the key to understanding history and the particular form of a
society. The political and intellectual life of society is determined by the mode of
production as necessitated by the wants of material life. 36 The discovery of new
productive forces makes the existing economic structures inadequate and
necessitates change. Those who control the economic structures oppose this
change and, as a result, revolution takes place. Thus revolutions are "hatched in
the womb of the old society itself".

Within each society there are some who own and control the means of
production and the class which controls the means of production controls the
rest. The domination of one class over another creates tension in the society. At
all stages of history, the forms of production determine the structure of the
society: "The mode of production in material life determines the general
character of social life and political and spiritual process of life". 37 Marx's idea of
the influence of socio-economic conditions on the dominant ideology has greatly influenced the thinking of the liberation theologians.

At every stage of history, the dominant class develops its opposite force and, as a result of the clash between the two—"Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman . . .", the new class emerges. History evolves through a dialectical process of change. As new modes of production arise they come into conflict with the old base of organised society: "At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production". Through class struggle the dominant class is overthrown at each stage of history; eventually, the capitalists and the proletariat will face one another, one acting as thesis, the other as anti-thesis; out of their opposition and struggle, there will emerge the synthesis — the classless society. Before the emergence of classless society comes the transitional period known as socialism when the proletariat will socialise the natural resources and destroy the remnants of capitalism.

According to Marx,

In the social production of their material life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their wills. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of the development of their material force of production. The sum total of these relations of production makes up the economic structure of society . . . The mode of production of material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life process in general".
In Marx’s opinion, “social relations are closely bound up with productive forces”. Whenever there occurs a change in the mode of production due to new productive forces it will have its impact on prevailing ways of living and earning, and ultimately change the social relations. Engels considers the change in the mode of production as the cause of political revolutions.

Marx’s materialistic interpretation of history has been criticised as insufficient to account for the complexity of historical changes. There are other competing interpretations of history, besides the economic one with emphasis placed on ethical, political, religious, scientific and legal aspects of social organisation: “The most obvious non-economic factor, and the one the neglect of which has led socialists most astray is nationalism.” Marx obviously paid insufficient attention to these other forces of historical change.

**Marx and Religion**

The adoption of Marxist categories by liberation theologians has been criticised mainly on the assumption that it may necessarily lead to the acceptance of Marx’s atheism as well. It is pertinent, therefore, to look at the main ideas of Marx on religion. Marx adopted the theory of Ludwig Feuerbach that religion is only a “projection” of the person’s own “species being” into an alien being — God. Frederick Engels wrote in 1886 about the sudden turn-around to atheism in the Hegelian school:

Then came Feuerbach’s Essence of Christianity. At a stroke, it demolished the contradiction by raising materialism again without more ado to the throne. Nature exists independently of all philosophy; it is the foundation on which we human beings,
ourselves products of nature, have grown up; apart from nature and man nothing exists and the higher beings produced by our religious imagination are merely the weird reflections of our own nature. In other words,

The divine is the universally human projected into the hereafter. What are the attributes of the divine nature: love, wisdom, justice . . .? In reality, these are attributes of man, of the human species. Homo homini Deus est, man is God for man: here lies the whole mystery of religion. The attributes of God, so the argument goes, are simply the attributes of the objectified nature of man. Man is a great projector and God the great projection. Thus man created God in his own image. God is the creation of the human intelligence. So man is the criterion of all reality, and "man himself is the beginning, center and end of religion; religion is man's self-worship. Consequently, religion is an odd mixture of truth and falsehood". It is important to see Feuerbach's idea of religion for what it is, without exaggeration or distortion. He saw the notion of God as a psychological product of man. According to him, "what man wishes to be, he makes his God". Religion, thus, is regarded as a product of man's instinct for self-preservation.

In 1841, Karl Marx obtained, after six years of study, his doctorate for his dissertation based on the ancient atheistic philosophy titled "The Difference between the Democritan and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature". Marx, "born a Jew, brought up as a Christian, finishing off his education as an atheist", proclaimed his atheism in the preface, quoting the promethean "I hate the pack
of Godsn, and declared human consciousness the supreme and the sole deity that ever existed. Marx praised Epicurus in the doctoral dissertation, for, he blamed "those who believe that man needs heaven". Marx, in his article "Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right" tries to answer the two questions — How does religious alienation come about? How can it be overcome? He tries to explain religion in the context of "concrete sociological conditions" and comes to the conclusion that unjust and inhuman social conditions produce religious consciousness and, in turn, this consciousness sanctions, supports and justifies the existing conditions. Religion diverts our attention, according to Marx, from this world to the other with a promise of the hereafter. So, religion is like a narcotic producing illusory happiness. "It is the opium of the people". Antonio Gramsci thinks that the identification of religion with opium may have been suggested to Marx by his reading of Balzac who had called lotteries "the opium of misery".

Marx is against abolishing religion without changing the circumstances which make the 'pain killer' necessary. When religion — the illusory happiness — is denied, people should be able to enjoy real happiness. Criticism of religion should lead to criticism of politics and, in the end, it must lead to practical revolution.

According to Hans Küng, "Marx was an atheist long before he became a Communist". Leftwing Hegelian philosophy had already shown him the way to atheism and not the wretched situation of the proletariat which means that his communism is not based on atheism; on the contrary, his atheism precedes his socialism or communism. The arguments, psychological and historical-philosophical which may be put forward against Feuerbach's atheism may be
applied to Marx, too, since he simply accepted the projection theory of Feuerbach. Though Marx never studied religion as a social scientist, it stands to his credit that he brought to the notice of the world how the economic factors may affect the world of ideas and the history of religion. Marx's critique of religion is one-sided; he never took seriously the Biblical understanding of God and man. He falsely identified Christianity with the ecclesiastical systems of Byzantium. According to Marx, "the critique of religion is the pre-condition of all criticism" and Orthodox Marxism is necessarily atheistic.

Marxism: Various Interpretations

Undoubtedly, Marxism has exercised a great influence on liberation theology, and the theologians themselves would be the first to acknowledge the fact. Gutierrez writes:

... contemporary theology does, in fact, find itself in direct and fruitful confrontation with Marxism and it is to a large extent due to Marxism's influence that theological thought, searching for its own sources, has begun to reflect on the meaning of the transformation of this world and human action in history.

With this J. L. Segundo concurs:

After Marx, our way of conceiving and posing the problems of society will never be the same again. Whether everything Marx said is accepted or not, and in whatever way one may conceive his 'essential' thinking, there can be no doubt that present day social thought will be 'Marxist' to some extent: ... that is, profoundly indebted to Marx.
Latin American liberation theology may well be taken to illustrate the case in which Christians attempt to come to terms with Marxism. Arthur F. McGovern is of the opinion that liberation theology's method owes much to Marx's critique of ideologies.  

Liberation theologians have made use of the "fruitful confrontation" with Marxism in their endeavour to analyse and evaluate social realities. But Marxism is open to a variety of interpretations. Hans Küng makes a distinction between orthodox Marxism and revised Marxism. According to Küng, the former is essentially atheistic while the latter could be non-atheistic. In Europe and South America the non-orthodox party theorists are aiming at a "practical alliance" between Christians and Marxists. Hans Küng wrote in 1978 that non-orthodox Communist parties are inviting practising Christians to join the party without a profession of atheistic materialism". Hence, today "... there are differing interpretations of Marxism: in addition to Soviet, Maoist, Spanish or Italian communistic interpretations ... in addition to all atheistic interpretations, there is also a Christian interpretation of Marx".

The conditions of workers, especially in the so-called catholic countries, have inspired laymen and priests to support Marxism which, they hope, would remove undesirable social abuses and bring about an equitable social order. There is also a distinction between the "young" and the "mature" Marx which is a bone of contention even among the Marxists. The early Marx, under the influence of Hegel, clearly gave an important place to "the old philosophic theme of 'freedom', 'man', the 'human person' and 'alienation'". And it is only in the later mature works, that Marx acquires the features he is now known by. According to E. P. Thomson, Marx's writings underwent a profound shift during
the late 1840s. It is the young Marx who had provided relevant themes for religion and theology. Althusser, a French Marxist theoretician, makes a distinction between Marxist "ideology" and Marxist "science". Liberation theologians cite Althusser's distinction to justify their use of Marxism as an analytical tool, claiming that the liberation theologian's use of Marxism has only practical rather than ideological implications.

R. T. De George speaks of three groups of Marxists — Scientific Marxists, the Humanist Marxists and the Critical Marxists — each of which represents a different view of communism and the means to achieve it. The first group consists of Marxist-Leninists. They hold the most dogmatic stereotyped view of Marxism. The second group comprises the Marxists of the non-Soviet Eastern Europe who are trying to develop a humane socialism. They do not accept Engel's doctrine of dialectical materialism. They emphasise the humanistic aspects of *Das Kapital* rather than its scientific aspects. They take the line that the "means" should be as humane as the "end". The third group may be found in Western Europe and in USA. They were opposed to Soviet socialism and have developed Marx's criticism of capitalism so as to update his theory. They oppose private ownership and state ownership as practised in Communist countries. Arthur F. McGovern speaks of two different "Traditions" — the dominant Marxist tradition and critical Marxism — which together include almost all interpretations of Marxism.

It is evident from the above discussion that it is not easy to affix the label "Marxist" to any given line of thought because it is . . . " an extremely slippery concept which eludes grasp and definition."
Marxism lends itself to a variety of interpretations. This being the case, can a Christian be a Marxist? Because of the socio-political and theological complexity of the problems existing in various countries and continents, a simple and single answer to this vexed question is not easy. In his philosophical notebook, Lenin wrote: “After a half century, not a single Marxist has understood Marx”. 66 This is hardly reassuring to one who is looking for clear distinctions and definitions. Some elements of Marxist theory of society shorn of its atheism have found acceptance even in the capitalist west, while certain other elements have a questionable status even in the Communist East. 67 The answer to the question posed above would depend on the definition of what one understands by “Marxism”. Sometimes Marxism is simply understood as a social science with positive humanist tendencies which does not exclude belief in God. Sometimes it is regarded as a form of free democratic socialism 68 with which numerous practising Christians feel able to collaborate. In this sense, “a Christian can be a socialist . . . but a Christian is not bound to be a socialist”. 69 For a Christian, it is Christ, not Marx who must provide the ultimate criterion with which to judge questions such as social justice, class struggle, race, etc.

**Marxism and Liberation Theology**

Liberation theology is vehemently criticised for borrowing Marxist concepts “uncritically”. As a matter of fact, liberation theologians have been critical of Marxist concepts. They have vigorously opposed the tendency to reduce every form of alienation to economic factors. To them ‘sin’, 70 and not capitalist exploitation, is the ultimate cause of all “injustice and oppression”. Against Marx’s “immanentist horizon”, liberation theology upholds the “eschatological” 71 aspect of history. Liberation theologians accept Marx’s view
of history as an explanation of great importance but they reject its claim to be the ultimate explanation. The Christian understanding of history is that of an alliance between God and humanity: God is the master of history and mankind is the privileged actor in the historical drama, and as such meant to be free and responsible persons.

If there is some similarity between the “poor” in the Bible and the “proletariat” in Marx as a social class, the Bible could never have borrowed it from Marx!

Poverty in the Bible is indeed primarily a sociological category but it is not to be defined in purely economic, much less in Marxist terms. . . Biblical poverty has a broader sociological and even a religious meaning. The poor of the Bible are an oppressed group in conflict, but it is doubtful whether their conflict can be usefully described as a class struggle . . . The poor in the Bible aspire after a free, fraternal and non-exploitative community which does indeed call to mind the classless society in Marx. But the Bible goes beyond Marx’s classless society . . .

Even though liberation theologians find some similarity between the “poor” and the proletariat they do not identify the poor with the proletariat.

Hugo Assmann — among liberation theologians the one that maintains the closest affinity to Marxist theory — will only go so far as to say that liberation theologians do make “use of a sociological analysis derived from Marxism”. Jose Miguez Bonino, the Argentinean Protestant theologian, opens his book *Christians and Marxists* with the honest confession: “Suddenly, the theologians
are becoming Communist and the Communists are becoming theologians".  

Liberation theologians use Marxism as “a tool of social analysis”.

Gutierrez is often criticised as a Marxist because of his statements on class struggle and his pronounced commitment to the poor in the struggle. He does indeed consider class struggle as a valid concept and a fact of social life. Moreover, he is of the opinion that the Church should opt for the poor in their class struggle. In the first edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez writes of “Christian Brotherhood and Class Struggle” (pp. 272-79) and for the fifteenth anniversary edition of 1988, he rewrote that section under a new title “Faith and Social Conflict” (pp. 156-61). By the fifteenth anniversary edition, the themes dealt with had grown deeper and he cites Popes and Councils to clarify his position. “The claim that conflict is a social fact does not imply an unqualified acceptance of it as something beyond discussion”. Again he wrote: “Our active participation on the side of justice . . . does not mean that we are encouraging conflict”. His stance becomes even clearer when he writes: “I am obviously not identifying the preferential option for the poor with any ideology or specific political program”. The samples from *A Theology of Liberation* speak for themselves.

In his book *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Gutierrez never once mentions Marx, but in its 171 pages there is a total of four hundred references to the Bible. Gutierrez thinks that Marxist analysis, with sufficient caution, could be profitably separated from Marxism’s atheistic worldview. At the same time, he is cautious about Althusser’s distinction between Marxism as an “ideology” and as a “science”. Marxist analysis may be used, but its significance should not be magnified out of proportion. Paul E. Sigmund is of the opinion that some critics
are "overstating the Marxist dimension of liberation thought"; he observes that in Gutierrez's most recent book, there is no Marx at all. 83

During the presentation of Gutierrez's doctoral thesis, he was asked to spell out the significance of the use of Marxism by liberation theologians. He answered: "It is one of those that most worry people and because of the use of Marxist analysis which has not always been correctly interpreted". 84 According to Gutierrez, dehumanising poverty

... is a very important problem to liberation theology. We want to proclaim the gospel most effectively in this situation. For this we want to know the situation of poverty and its causes. Here we are dealing with a social reality. We made use of the means of the social sciences. In this attempt we made use of Marxist concepts. At the same time, however, we do not attempt, or claim, to make an exclusive and complete use of Marxist analysis in liberation theology. 85

Further, he emphasised that "... the Marxist philosophy of the human person and of atheism has never played a part in liberation theology. On this point, my position is clear and emphatic". But James V. Schall criticises Gutierrez vehemently saying that Gutierrez tried to blend Christianity with Marxism. 86 Gutierrez admits that liberation theologians take certain elements from Marxism to explain the social reality but, for this reason, they should not be, in any way, identified with Marxists. Gutierrez is very clear on this point: "At no time, either explicitly or implicitly, have I suggested a dialogue with Marxism with a view to a possible "synthesis" or to accepting one aspect while leaving others aside." 87 In his opinion, "we can't accept Marxism fully because it excludes the Christian
faith and its requirements . . . There is no question, at all, of a possible acceptance of an atheistic ideology." And he further writes: "An atheistic ideology and a totalitarian vision are to be discarded and rejected, not only by our faith but by any truly humanistic outlook and even by a sound social analysis." Further, he says, he is not "denying the contributions Marxism has made to our understanding of economic and social matters." It is clear from the above remarks that one can no longer criticise Gutiérrez for what his opponents call an "uncritical" acceptance of Marxist theory and practice.

Liberation theology addresses itself to the religious needs of the people and the economic conditions in which they live. It is obvious that one does not necessarily become a Marxist by committing oneself to the cause of the poor. "To opt for the poor does not mean to opt for Marx". Archbishop Dom Helder Camera puts the case very well when he says that Marxism deserves patient study because of its enormous power to move and inspire:

When a man, whether philosopher or not, attracts irresistibly millions of human beings, especially young people, when a man becomes the inspiration for life and for death of a great part of humanity, and makes the powerful of the earth tremble with hate and fear, this man deserves to be studied . . . As the University of Chicago chose to take upon herself the responsibility of celebrating St. Thomas Aquinas' seventh centenary we have the right to suggest that the best way to honour the centenary . . . should be for the University of Chicago to try, today, to do with Karl Marx what St. Thomas in his day did with Aristotle."
Clodovis Boff in an interview \(^9\) said: "We make use of Marxism to interpret the social reality". Marxism, in his opinion, developed from the perspective of the oppressed; it enables the poor to see their situation for what it is

\[ \ldots \] the basic communities see Marxism on the basis of praxis, and for this reason they embark on an instrumental and free relationship with Marxism; they adopt it freely as an instrument of clarification, and for this reason they have a critical and corrective relationship with it. The church communities sense where Marxism does not give an explanation, where it is limited, and they go beyond it \[ \ldots \] and above all \[ \ldots \] great faith \[ \ldots \] carries them forward. Marx is like a travelling companion who can help to interpret their situation of oppression, but no more than that. \(^9\)

Further, Boff says that if they do not take to Marxism, capitalism, which they are experiencing with all its dehumanising effects, would be left uncriticised. Boff \(^9\) is critical of both Marxism and capitalism and stands for a "third way" which would base itself on "love of the least, equality, brotherhood, solidarity, power as service, a shared economy." \(^9\) The Boffs \(^7\) in their book *Introducing Liberation Theology* assert that liberation theology uses Marxism "purely as an instrument" and that Marxism can be a "travelling companion", but never the guide, who is Christ. \(^8\) Boff's theology can hardly be called a compromise with Marxism.

Jon Sobrino \(^9\) attributes a "class outlook" to the historical Jesus. In his opinion, Jesus acted from a class outlook and Christian discipleship means following "his way" in the class struggle. This logic has some validity only if Jesus indeed had the "class outlook" that is attributed to him. Even though
Sobrino asserts this class outlook of Jesus, he admits that this concept is ambiguous and difficult to prove.

Juan Luis Segundo discusses Marxist analysis elaborately in his book *Faith and Ideologies*. Segundo finds Marxist analysis a "useful method" but criticises Marxism for its failure to use "humanistic values" as a guide to constructing socialist societies.  

Jose Porfirio Miranda, in his famous book, *Marx and the Bible*, saw close parallels between "Marxist analysis" and the "prophetic critiques" of the Bible but has since changed his views on Marxism radically. Latterly, he dismissed Marxist analysis as being based on false reductionism which separates work from conscious activity. Jose Comblin, a staunch critic of Marxism, gives ample warnings against ideologies which may "appear" scientific but are, in fact, trying to impose their own values and programmes.

Now-a-days liberation theologians adopt a cautious approach towards Marxism. They use Marxism as a "tool of social analysis". They only make a selective use of Marxism and try to dissociate themselves from the Marxist ideology. There is also an appreciable difference between the use of Marxism in the early period of liberation theology and the use made of it today. Direct references to Marxism are very rare in the recent works. With regard to liberation theology's liaison with Marxism, Michael Löwy points out that the period between 1968-1980 is radical, and the succeeding years a relatively reserved and cautious one. A. F. McGovern considers the recent phase of liberation theology as more "theological" than Marxist.
Critique of Capitalism

Liberation theologians have an unreservedly negative approach towards capitalism which, according to them, has failed to meet the basic needs of the vast majority of the people. Gutierrez makes a scathing attack on capitalism, for, according to him, it produces "dependency" between nations; in this context liberation implies confrontation with the capitalist countries and "their compatriots who control the national power structure" because, Gutierrez thinks that "the problems [of Latin America] are rooted in the structures of capitalist society"105 existing in the continent. The Brazilian bishops of the Amazon region condemned capitalism outright when they wrote: "We must overcome capitalism. It is the greatest evil, the rotten root, the tree that produces those fruits we all know: poverty, hunger, sickness, and death of the majority. The vast majority work to enrich the few".106

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff have also written in the same vein on the evils of capitalism. "Capitalism can be more or less immoral, it can never be more or less moral. You do not eliminate the ferocity of a wolf by filing down its teeth". Again, "It is just as impossible to create a moral market system as it is to build a Christian brothel".107 In Boff's opinion, capitalism produces inequalities in every sphere.108 According to Franz Hinkelammerto, hundreds of people are living in extreme poverty due to capitalism which considers "the freedom to murder"109 as vital to it and money as God.

Liberation theologians claim to find the cause of poverty and underdevelopment in the dominance of capitalism and capitalism is stress on profit which they see as a "form of idolatry".110 McGuez Bonino considers capitalism as anti-Christian since "it is the maximising of economic gain . . . the idolizing of
the strong, the subordination of man to economic production". But, defenders of capitalism like Michael Novak claim that what is practised in Western Europe and North America as capitalism has not yet been tried in Latin America and the liberation theologians' attack on capitalism is pointless like chasing a shadow.112

Pope John Paul II in his second encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On social concern) issued on 30 December 1987, considers liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism as false ideologies requiring correction.113 Dennis P. McCanan observes that “the posture of Catholic social teaching toward capitalism traditionally has ranged from uncomprehending hostility to a grudging acceptance of it as a sinful structure in need of reform”.114

**Liberation Theology and Paulo Freire**

Paulo Freire115 (1921), a Brazilian by birth, is considered, together with Gustavo Gutierrez, a pioneer in liberation thinking. Freire’s writings as well as active campaigning have greatly contributed to advancing the cause of liberation in Latin America. He developed a practical method for literacy education among the poor Brazilians and offered to the oppressed masses in the continent a new paradigm in political and liberative praxis. Freire, a professor in Recife University, was appointed in 1962 as the co-ordinator of adult literacy programmes, sponsored by the Mayor of Recife, Miguel Arreias. The following year, as a result of his fruitful work, the government of Joao Goulart selected him as the head of the national literacy programme. But when the government, which selected him, was deposed by the military in 1964, he was arrested, expelled from the university, and eventually, from the country. He was accused of stirring the people to revolution through his literacy programme.
Freire used his literacy programme not to “dominate” but to “liberate people.” His motto was “education for liberation” and his method has been widely known as “conscientization”. In his opinion, there are two types of education: “banking” and “problem posing”. According to the former concept, education becomes an “act of depositing” where students are considered as “depositories” and the teacher as the “depositor”. The banking concept of education considers the students as “adaptable, manageable” objects. It will not create any “critical consciousness” in them and will not make them “transformers” of the world. The latter concept of education poses the problem of human beings in relation to their world. It “conscientizes” the people to “perceive critically” the world around them in which they live. The problem posing education “bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation”.

According to Freire, the “conscientization method” refers to the process in which men, achieve a deepening awareness not as recipients but as knowing subjects, both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality”. On this view, human beings are not only “in” the world, but also “with” the world (animals are in the world). Human beings can act, reflect and transform reality. Conscientization is aimed at a praxis towards transforming the world.

Freire’s conscientization strategy offered priests and lay activists a model for engaging with the poor. Evidently, Freire’s epistemological and ideological notions are drawn from Marxist social theory:
Freire eventually adopted the Marxist interpretation of the theory of ideology as foundational for his pedagogical approach. From Marxian dialectics he appropriates such ideas as the necessity of class struggle, the unity of action and reflection, human mark as praxis, the function of ideology and the structure and dynamics of alienation. 118

Freire’s sociology offers perhaps the best illustration of liberation theology’s ideological moorings in Marxist theory and practice.

**Liberation Theology: Its Methodology**

Liberation theology’s critique of society owes much to Marxist social analysis. The crucial notion here is “analysis.” An analysis is a method of inquiry that consists in breaking down a complex reality into its simplest elements that is to determine their relative place and importance. Thus one will distinguish, thanks to the analysis, what is primary and secondary, essential and accidental, cause and effect, profound reality or mere appearance. 119

In analysis, there is the “breaking down” of a complex phenomenon which leads to a new “synthesis” wherein lies the completion of the analytical enquiry. An analysis which is political and theoretical at first, eventually becomes multidisciplinary, that is, it makes use of different scientific disciplines in the process of analysis. Secondly, such an analysis takes into consideration similar enquiries made by others; thirdly, it represents the reality from the standpoint of a specific worldview and puts forward proposals for changing the reality and fourthly, it examines various hypotheses for action. A political analysis worth its
name, should lead to action. Behind every political action is a political decision which terminates in implementation of the action plan.

According to Rene Costa, Marxist analysis is not just a political analysis; it is also a social analysis that is "a fundamental analysis of the whole of human reality." A social analysis may be divided into economic analysis, cultural analysis, political analysis, anthropological analysis, historical analysis, etc. so as to include the whole complex of human reality. Marxist analysis is aimed at changing the world for the benefit of the oppressed people and as such it is a social critique which should lead to a "revolutionary praxis". Thus, Marxist analysis is at once a social analysis and a social critique aimed at revolutionary praxis.

An established tradition needs no methodological justification but when it tries to criticise another of its kind it needs a new methodology. Liberation theology sets out to criticise the dominant trends in European theology. Greek philosophy which provides the theoretical underpinning of European theology starts with "wonder" at the mystery of human existence and the world. For Latin America, "suffering" in the present, here and now, is the starting point for understanding the human condition and the divine milieu: "At crowning moments of divine revelation there has always been suffering, the cry of the oppressed in Egypt; the cry of Jesus on the cross . . . the truth pangs experienced by the whole of creation as it awaits liberation". There is misery in the world and liberation theology makes a critical assessment of the source that produces this misery because, "Misery is not innocent. It does not come out of nowhere". How can we in such a situation preach the love of God? In order
to do that, first, we have to know the social reality better so that we may be able
to lead the victims of oppression and injustice out of their wretchedness.

In this context, we speak of “three mediations” of liberation theology. By
“mediation” we mean “the complex of means (the instruments) which theology
uses to achieve its goal”. The three mediations are: the socio-analytical, the
hermeneutic and the pastoral practice.

**Socio-Analytical Mediation**

If one wants to control and alter a given situation at all effectively, a
critical awareness of social reality is required such as is not possible within the
terms and categories of conventional theology. Certain basic epistemological
obstacles may create a priori impediments to the understanding of the reality.
The first of these is empiricism. “Empiricism describes the facts but fails to
establish any causal nexus among them. What is lacking is analysis”. According to Boff, “. . . empiricism moves from (1) the facts to (2) a naive awareness to (3) assistentialism”. One may be struck by the magnitude of poverty among the people; one could reel off lists of glaring facts. One might stop there, refusing to go beyond the factual dimension. In this case, one fails to
go deep into the invisible causes of the given state of affairs. In this approach, a
person may have a naive awareness of the situation as it is and a naive conscience; sometimes, led by noble intentions, he may display signs of an assistentialistic mentality. Boff asks: Is this the best way of grasping the reality of a given situation or is this the best way of aiding the needy? This method, according to Boff, “supplies you with a pond, but does not teach you to fish”.

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The second obstacle to social analysis is theologism. Theologism claims to be able to explain all problems — social, political, etc. — in terms of theology. This claim is virtually denied by the fact that “The legitimacy and contributions of other discourses are not acknowledged. Theology is substituted for social analysis”. The third epistemological obstacle is “bilingualism”. “Analysis and theological reflection can be simply juxtaposed, yielding two readings of reality without mutual articulation”. This may result in a “semantic commixture” — a mixing up of languages and disciplines, now using social analysis, now resorting to theological reflection.

For a correct analysis of social reality one should be careful to eliminate all these epistemological impediments. To this end, Boff suggests that one should evolve one’s method of critical analysis, or make use of such analyses as have already been made by the social sciences. In this way, one might be enabled to understand or improve one’s perception of the contradictory realities and factors that prevent one from acquiring a critical knowledge of the reality. The socio-analytical mediation tries to identify the causes of poverty and oppression. It rejects laziness and backwardness as the cause of poverty. It makes use of Marxism, “as an instrument” to analyse the situation of poverty and oppression.

**Hermeneutic Mediation**

Liberation theology calls for a renewed use of the hermeneutic mediation. “Hermeneutics is the science and technique of interpretation by means of which we are enabled to understand the original meanings of any writings (or realities) no longer immediately comprehensible to men and women of today”. It does not interpret the scriptures in the abstract. Instead, it aims at a theological
reading of the social reality depicted in the Bible — a reading in the light of faith in which the “secular material” is transformed into “theological material”.

In the hermeneutic mediation, a theologian is trying to see whether or not God’s grace, salvation, etc. is present in the present day social reality. In other words, the theologian is trying to see the reality from the standpoint of Christian faith. For example, between the Bible and the believers of today there is a distance in time of about two thousand years. The circumstances of life have changed altogether, and words have acquired new meanings. If the meaning of the Bible is lost due to historical changes, how can it guide us? So we have to interpret it, make it relevant and meaningful to the present time. Hence the need for a hermeneutic mediation. In the hermeneutic mode, the aim is to discover the meaning of the Bible in the context of current social problems. In this analysis, due consideration will be given to the fact that the reality of God is experienced through the contingent circumstances of race, religion and the historical milieu. God is present in social reality; but the reality of God is not co-terminous with social history. This mediation poses the question of oppression, injustice and considers what guidance can be gained in fighting them from biblical revelation. It lays stress on those themes which are most relevant to the “situation of the poor”. Hence, it focuses on Exodus which describes the liberation of the oppressed Israelites; on the Prophets for their scathing tirade against the rich and the defence of the poor; on the Gospels for its description of Jesus and his liberating message; on the Acts of the Apostles for its portrayal of the classless, egalitarian Christian community of early times.
Mediation of Pastoral Practice

The socio-analytical and hermeneutic reading of historical reality ought to lead us to pastoral practices of transformation. In this sphere, we translate into action what had previously been seen, assessed and judged. This praxis springs from faith and is directed by faith consciousness; it is intended to construct the ideals of social justice, human dignity and a community of participation in everything by all. A critical knowledge of the reality of the given social condition determines the path to be followed by faith. The ultimate goal is always liberation.

In pastoral practice, first, we have to take into consideration “the total play of social forces”, economic, social, political, repressive, ideological, etc.; so that we may not “fall victim to a naive voluntarism”. We do not do what we wish to do but we do what the objective conditions of reality permit us to do. Pastoral practice also tries to identify the “locus” where the church can take the initiative in setting right the economic, social, and political conditions. How the church can perform its liberating activity is the main point of contention. The church has to act as an agent of liberation. Its activities, teachings and transactions with the established authority should be aimed at this goal of liberation. The church also has to interact with other forces that try to bring about a qualitative change. The church should co-operate with other forces because, by doing so, it might expedite the liberation process. The Christian communities, wherever they exist, should act directly at the political and infrastructural level to bring about liberation. Liberation comes about through the concerted efforts of numerous people engaged in the work of social transformation.
In this pastoral practice, two criteria should be observed: faith and reality. "The motive for action must spring from the matrix of faith". Faith, in its symbolic form, is a message that calls for personal conversion aimed at a new way of living. Faith inspires an unquenching thirst for liberation and this should be kept alive in order to have true praxis. Pastoral practice should emerge from a correct assessment of the ground realities. One must find out the co-relation of social forces and make a prudential judgement as to what is permissible and what is viable, in a given situation. One should also determine what allies one can depend on and the possibility of systematic opposition from national and global power centres.

Liberation Theology and "Violence"

Violence, for liberation theologians, is not merely the use of physical force to achieve one's ends. It is the aggressive tendency to dehumanize, to impose one's will on others and on the environment. In this sense, economic subjugation, poverty, racism, political suppression are all forms of violence. In other words, "violence is dehumanisation and exploitation". In this sense violence may be seen to have operated from the very beginning of human history and various theologians have called attention to it from time to time.

St. Augustine, though with much reluctance, accepts the idea of a "just war". "A just war is justified only by the injustice of an aggressor". He recognises a soldier's right to fight for the sake of "peace". And so, in the opinion of Augustine, there could be such a thing as a just war or a justifiable war. From Augustine onwards we see variations of this idea being put forward by moralists and social activists. According to Prof. Roger Shinn, professor of Social Ethics at Union Seminary, New York, one might propose, along with the
idea of a 'just war', the idea of a "just revolution", too. He cites the example of the Armenian Christians who took up arms against the tyrant Marimin when he tried to impose idol worship on them and forced him to yield. John of Salisbury, Bishop of Chartres, wrote in 1159: "It is just for public tyrants to be killed and the people set free for the service of God." During John's time it was not possible to dislodge a ruler by an election or impeachment. Hence it is that where no possibilities exist for effecting peaceful change, some thinkers might advocate a "counter-violence" which could be justified under the circumstances.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), when a tyrant captures power and there is no higher authority to appeal to, and no other way of removing him "one who liberates his country by killing the tyrant is to be praised and rewarded". Obviously, Aquinas considers a tyrannical government as unjust and maintains that it should be removed, by force, if necessary. It does not follow from this that he justifies every kind of revolution but only those that are justifiable for reasons already given. Theologians usually discuss the theme of violence in relation to Jesus. Jesus, in the gospels, rejects the "use of violence" and suffers violence. Jesus' followers were ordered to help the poor, heal the sick and relieve suffering but no strict action plan was formulated for carrying out this mission. Obviously, he left it to "... the responsibility of the individual". So according to Frederick Sontag, the decision on the use of violence is left to the discretion of the individual.

James Cone sees the "black revolution" in America as the "revolution of God". Considering that the US regime allows for legislative and political reforms within a democratic framework, this view seems hardly tenable, and is
even contrary to the Bible's exhortation to love: "What we need is the divine love as expressed in Black power which is the power of black people to destroy their oppressors here and now, by any means at their disposal". This is an example of how Christianity's commitment to justice could be misinterpreted to justify violence. And, according to Cone liberation means "revolutionary action against injustice, slavery and oppression". This kind of rhetoric might give the impression that violence is endemic to liberation theology.

Liberation theologians clearly state that violence is inherent in an unjust society. Gibellini, concurring with Gutierrez, identifies three types of violence: (a) institutionalised violence, i.e., the violence used by the dominant structures of the social order; (b) repressive violence which is used to defend the structures; (c) the counter violence by the victims of the above two types of violence. The oppressors use naked power to subjugate the oppressed and the poor and keep them in dehumanising conditions. The poor are victims of "institutionalised violence" and the Medellin Conference took note of the "temptation to violence" and warned that "one should not abuse the patience of a people that for years have borne a situation that would not be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights".

Bernard Häring, the renowned moral theologian, is not averse to the idea of a "just revolution". The very meaning of a Christian, according to Häring, is "to be on the move"; not to be content with the status quo; nor must one settle for minor adjustments. A Christian stands for the reformation of social conditions and the strongest power in this drive is love which "mobilises and triumphs even in defeat". So one usually refrains from all violent actions. But one may use the "minimum of violence in resisting injustice".
According to Jose Migenez Bonino, the violence of the oppressors sometimes demand violence in return. In Leonardo Boff's opinion, the oppressed may use violence only when they are forced to do so. The church accepts the idea of a "just war" — a war as a last resort. Is the reference to violence by liberation theologians something contrary to the teaching of the church on a "just war"? No liberation theologian of international repute has advocated violence without reservations. The theology of liberation has not developed a "theology of violence" and it does not have any particular answer to the problem of violence. No one criticises the United States' Declaration of Independence, even though it contains these words: "Whenever one Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends; all persons created equal, have certain undeniable rights; it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it and to institute a new government". It is unfair to see too much "violence" in liberation theology. Liberation theology does not offer a systematic exposition of the concept of violence or a solution to it. Far from recommending violence uncritically, it even expresses the fear that "armed violence" may create "new injustices".

**Summary**

Marxists and Christians, though opposed to each other, are sometimes described as "quarrelsome brothers". In 1937, Pope Pius XI declared: "Communism is intrinsically evil, and there can be no collaboration with it in any field on the part of those who want to save Christian civilization". But by 1970, the Latin American theologians campaigned for a "strategic alliance" with communism to save their sub-continent from exploitation. In the 1970s there are Marxists because they were Christians, and, according to Hebblethwaite, they
were sincere Christians and at the same time, sincere Marxists. This is not to say that their stand was correct; but it was certainly one that required and received a good deal of discussion and explanation.

"Marxism is a slippery concept which eludes grasp and definition." This means that Marxism is liable to be interpreted differently by different thinkers and the Christian response, too, has varied accordingly. It is well known that Marx was the first to draw attention to the massive negative impact of the industrial revolution on human beings. Marx saw the "dehumanising and devaluing" impact of the industrial revolution on the individual. But he was a thorough-going atheist. According to Marx, "... a being above man and nature... becomes impossible" and his atheism is "complete, untroubled, serene and necessary". No distinction can be made in this regard between the "young Marx" and the "Mature Marx".

Unlike Christianity, Marxism claims to offer an analysis or explanation of the material conditions of life as it is lived here and now, has a clear project for the future, has a strategy for implementing its policies and programmes. Christianity lacks or is vague on the above three elements. And so, in order to analyse the physical conditions of life in their continent, Latin American theologians have had recourse to marxism. They also try to adopt a strategy modelled on the marxist action plan. Two views of marxism have been popular since the Second World War. One of them identifies it with "the Beast of the Apocalypse", as an evil that is irremediable. The other view states that Communism which arose as a consequence of widespread social injustice would not have appeared in the first place if Christians had discharged their duties in line with the papal encyclicals. Those who hold this view accept the aspirations
of Marxism for a just society. Christians who consider themselves progressive belong to this group. The encyclical “Pacem in Terris” (peace in the world) which was addressed to “all men of goodwill” only indirectly condemned Marxism. That the Second Vatican Council made no condemnation of Communism indicates a further softening of attitude and gave the clear signal that Marxists and Christians could exchange views without insulting and abusing each other.

Liberation theology involves both a social thinking based on faith and a political commitment to changing the social order. It is not “about” liberation but “for” liberation. It is not a “theology of affluence” addressed to the privileged classes. Liberation theologians are “haunted and obsessed by injustices” prevailing in their community. They speak of the humiliated people of their continent. Their starting point is not an idea but the real life situation of the people. “Liberation” expresses the attempt and determination of the oppressed people to take their destiny into their own hands. In Medellin (1968), Latin American Bishops defined “salvation” in terms of liberation. They saw “sin and human egoism” as the ultimate cause of the oppression and injustice prevailing in their countries. Medellin did not give due consideration to the “structural causes” of injustice. Liberation theologians went further. By using the Marxist analysis, they tried to uncover the various levels of exploitation and unmask the oppressors.

They, next, tried to conscientize the illiterate about the real causes of their illiteracy and poverty. The next step was to conscientize the people using, mainly, Paulo Freire’s method and launched the struggle against the powers that be — the oppressors. The struggle may take different forms — small groups,
political covert activity, armed resistance, etc. according to different circumstances. But these theologians neither idealise nor promote violence. In situations like this, liberation theology does not ask: “what is to be believed” but “what is to be done”. Here, the primacy of action—“praxis” is implicitly accepted. This is where they turn to marxism for guidance. “They are Marxist because of the lack of any alternative analysis of society and the causes of its oppression”.160 As Boff has pointed out, liberation theologians used marxism “purely as an instrument”.161 Their use of Marxism is instrumental; in other words, practical rather than ideological.

According to Gutierrez, Althusser162, the French Marxist theoretician, opened up new possibilities with his distinction between Marxism as a “science” and as an “ideology”. This distinction enabled many Christians to understand and accept the positive elements in marxism. Dom Helder Camara thinks that “we can avail ourselves of the marxist method of analysis which is still valid, while leaving aside the materialistic concept of life”.163 It remains to point out, however, that the distinction of Marxism into science and ideology is largely conceptual and has not been found to work in practice effectively.164

Charles Taylor, a scholar, who investigated Hegel’s influence on Marx wrote: “I believe that the root cause of [Marxism’s] inadequacy is that it isn’t true; its solution is based on an illusion about the human condition. The premise that it holds out of complete reconciliation of man to other men, his creation of himself, all in one act, is unfulfillable”.165

To conclude, three points may be stressed with regard to liberation theology’s problematic stand towards Marxism:
(a) this theology's Marxist orientation was not the result of a sudden volt-face of the social conscience of the Catholic activists; rather, it came in the wake of a slow but perceptible change in the attitude of the Church towards its arch rival;

(b) there is much misunderstanding concerning the liberation theologian's use of Marxist social analysis;¹⁶⁶

(c) thirdly, it is important to realise that liberation theology has no truck with the purely secular and atheistic assumptions of Marxism: "The Marxist philosophy of the human person and of atheism has never played a part in liberation theology."¹⁶⁷
Notes


2 For Marx Socialism was "based on a scientific study of the past historical and economic developments" and it directly attacked not the evils of capitalism but capitalism itself for which he gave a definite technique of organization and attack. D. R. Bhandari, *History of European Political Philosophy* (Bangalore: The Bangalore Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1970) 533.


5 Ibid 102.

6 Ibid 125.


8 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 15.


Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts." qtd. in Eric Fromm, *Marx Concept of Man* 95.

Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" comprise four manuscripts which Marx wrote between April-August, 1844. See Eric Fromm, *Marx Concept of Man* 87-169.


Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," qtd. in Eric Fromm, *Marx Concept of Man* 140.


*Ibid* 110.

*Ibid* 130.


Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," qtd. in Eric Fromm, *Marx Concept of Man* 139.

26 Ibid 78.


29 Ibid 41.

30 It is very difficult to define the terms "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat". Now-a-days many workers are share-holders in companies and in a sense employers of other workers. Are these shareholders to be named bourgeoisie? The fact is that "every industrial population is in a constant state of flux, individuals moving up and down within it, the lines between classes being extremely vague and tenuous." K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 179.

31 Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* 78.


46 *Ibid* 201.


49 *Ibid* 218


51 Karl Marx, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 175. Later Lenin, who had unhappy experiences with the state and religion in Czarist Russia (Lenin's brother Alexander had been executed in connection with the murder of Czar Alexander II on March 1, 1881, which shocked Lenin deeply), changed "opium of the people" to "opium for the people" meaning by the change of phrase, the deliberate manipulation of people by the rulers. For further explanation, see Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?*, 238-40.


54 Cited by *Ibid* 257.

55 It is possible to distinguish three important contemporary groups of Marxists: the scientific Marxists, the humanist Marxists, and the critical Marxists. See, for further details, J. Burke (Ed.), *Marxism and the Good Society* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981) 1-31. Hans Küng also discusses different shades of Marxism and poses the question: can a Christian be a Marxist? According to him, the answer depends on the definition of Marxism. He concludes “a Christian can be a socialist . . . but a Christian is not bound to be a socialist”. See, for further details, Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?*, 256-61.


59 Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?*, 256-60.


Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?*, 258.

See, for the various types of socialism, *Concilium* 5, 13 (1977).

Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?*, 259.


Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church* 116.


Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 158.

79 Ibid 159.
80 Ibid 160.
82 Robert McAfee Brown, *Background to Liberation Theology* 94.
83 David Heim, "The Story of an Encounter," *Preferential Option for the Poor* 93.
84 Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* 37.
85 Ibid 37.
88 Ibid 61.
89 Ibid 61
90 Ibid 7.
92 Cited by James V. Sehall, *Liberation Theology* 284. Archbishop Dom Helder Camara was addressing the University of Chicago, during the Seventh Centenary Celebration of St. Thomas Aquinas.
93 Rosino Gibellini, *Liberation Theology Debate* 90.
94 Ibid 90.
95 After the publication of the "Instruction on Certain Aspects of Theology of Liberation" by Vatican on September 3, 1985, Boff met Cardinal Ratziger at Rome, to explain the ideas in his book, *Church: Charism and Power*.
96 Rosino Gibellini, *Liberation Theology Debate* 91.
97 Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*.
98 Ibid 28.
99 Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Perspective* is a treatise on historical Christology. It analyses liberation theology in a Latin American Perspective.

100 Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* 254+.


107 Cited by McGovern in *Liberation Theology and Its Critics* 39.


*Ibid* 16.

See, for the comparison and contrast between European theology and Liberation theology, Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (London: SCM Press, 1985) 6-10.


*Ibid* 49.

*Ibid* 5.
126 Ibid 6.
129 Ibid 49.
130 Ibid 49.
131 Arthur F. McGovern, Liberation Theology and Its Critics 36.
133 Arthur F. McGovern, Liberation Theology and Its Critics 36.
134 Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Salvation and Liberation 55.
135 Ibid 55.
139 Cited by Roger L. Shinn 325.
140 Cited by Roger L. Shinn 325.
143 Ibid 130.
144 Ibid 152.
145 Rosino Gibellini, The Liberation Theology Debate 47.
146 Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation 64.
147 Cited by Dean William Fern, Third World Liberation Theologies 116.

Ibid 8.

Ibid 5.


Cited by Peter Hebblethwaite 4.

Ibid 5.

Ibid 7.

Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” qtd. in Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* 140.


Pacem in Terris, No. 159.


Ibid 51.

After the November (15, 1980) incident, in which Althusser strangled his wife, this philosopher's influence has waned. For more details, see Frei Betto, “Gustavo Gutierrez: A Friendly Profile” *The Future of Liberation Theology* 31.


Ibid 104.

Cited by Peter Hebblethwaite 104.


Ibid 37.