

Liberating the Future: God, Mammon and Theology¹

A Book Review

“Theologians and religious persons everywhere” are invited to reflect “on God’s ongoing work of liberation in the midst of suffering and oppression” (v-vi). The reader is promised a menu of an international “cross-section of theologians.”

The economic context is the current domination of free market ideology. The suffering of large minorities in the West and of Third World majorities due to free market economics is upheld here as a major concern for theology.

A major theme is the antithesis between the Bible and free market ideology. They operate on a contradictory logic. The free market represents “a religion in its own right,” religion being “defined as that which makes us understand the world and our place in it” (7). These two religions are waging spiritual warfare with each other.

Another major theme is the role and place of Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology is not a special-interest affair. It is at the heart of what theology should be about. The differences between Liberation Theology, on the one hand, and liberal theology and European political theology, on the other, also are explained.

Positively, the book deals with critical contemporary economic issues that increasingly hurt people. This is not an exercise of objective theologizing leading to mere reflection, but it is done with appropriate biblical passion (vi). It forces one into engagement with the world.

Critically speaking, the book hardly represents a cross-section of theologians as promised. I recognize no representatives from the Orthodox, Reformed, Pentecostal, or evangelical traditions.

However, the main problem is the question: What is theology? I get the impression that any discussion that includes “God-talk” is considered theological.

¹ *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, Apr/2000, p. 211.

What of Christian economists like Bob Goudzwaard of The Netherlands? Is he a liberation theologian or an economist? He would claim the latter. However, the thrust of this book would turn him into a theologian. There is an urgent need for careful definition here.

The above confusion is probably the main reason for an even more serious problem: the lack of any attempt at solution or alternative. We are left hanging. All contributors condemn the free market; none provide an alternative.

This criticism should not prevent one from reading this collection. It will renew any flagging passion for the oppressed. That passion is more important than definitions.