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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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ASPIRING FOR STATUS AN OBSTACLE  
TO LIBERATION THEOLOGY

by



Dewey John Ames

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Religious Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts at  
The University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario

1981

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction .....	1
II. Aspiring For Status .....	8
III. The Work Ethic .....	18
IV. The Prophet Amos .....	30
V. Liberation Theology .....	43
VI. Conclusion .....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	80
VITA AUCTORIS .....	85

## ABSTRACT

This study is on the conflicting relationships that exists between aspiring for status, as a way of life, and the development of the theology of liberation; this theology challenges the negative impacts of aspiring for status as they affect the individual and society. This paper will argue that aspiring for status encourages individuals to compete for social, economic, and political status to the detriment of other human beings. In addition, aspiring for status will be seen as being reenforced by the sanctification of the work ethic setting people against each other.

An analysis of the social and historical roots of aspiring for status and the work ethic will be examined showing the intertwining effects that each has on the other. To challenge the effects of aspiring for status, the prophet Amos has been chosen among other biblical figures to illustrate the abuses of aspiring for status as seen during his lifetime. His example, as a voice of the poor and needy, is now brought to life by clergy and lay persons through the theology of liberation.

The theology of liberation is centered in a biblical belief that God calls us to participate actively in the social, political, and economic changes of this world. Theology of liberation confronts individuals who aspire for status. It demands that they liberate themselves from their materialistic goals and link up with the poor and needy to create a society based on social justice.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to...

the memory of my father, Dewey Calvin Ames, and the memory of my two friends, Albert Christie and Tim Walter. My father forced me to confront life with all its harshness, but was always there to help and advice me when I needed him. My two friends, Albert and Tim showed me how to live life and physically embrace it. Also, to a man I never met, but who has influenced me since my childhood, Dag Hammarskjöld.

my friends, who give me support, strength, and encouragement to fight for social change and to live life while doing it. Especially, Ike and Faye Krasner, James Briesmeister, Douglas Lee Davis, The Christie family, John Lindberg, William McDougall, Wally Pascoe, Ken and Mimi Youngert, Valeria Duda, and Greg Czentnar, the person with whom I share my life.

the workers at the Ford Rouge complex who taught me what a textbook could not. These men and women helped me indirectly to develop the issues raised in this thesis.

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The United States is presently facing a severe economic crisis. Foreign mineral resources have become increasingly expensive and, in some instances, these natural resources are being totally depleted. In addition, economic competition from abroad is challenging the American manufacturing sector for larger proportions of its own consumer market. Connected with these factors is the belief that the United States must defend the world against the spread of communism and protect its own extended empire; therefore, the country is forced to spend billions of dollars on defense which is inflationary and limits the essential needs of its people, such as adequate health care, housing, and nutritional needs just to name a few.

For many individuals unaffected directly by the present economic crisis, the accumulation of economic wealth, and the attaining of social and political power through aspiring for status are still viewed as fundamental elements of United States society. One of the key factors in promoting the present-day economic crisis is the aspiring for status. Aspiring for status pervades our entire society. It creates division by having individuals compete against each other. To own, to accumulate, and to control are concepts that are taught to individuals in our industrial society. Max Weber in his book, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, argues that a new spirituality arose in Calvinistic Christianity

that secularized religion, intertwining it into our capitalistic economy.

Christians experienced the meaning and power of the Gospel in their dedication to hard work and personal enterprise, and they regarded the success of their undertakings as God's approval and blessing. This new spirituality removed the religious obstacles to capitalistic expansion,...The new worldly asceticism, moreover, supplied strong religious motivation for secular effort to build a society that would reflect the new freedoms of the burgher and allow for his free enterprise in industry and commerce. Thanks to this new ethos, it was eventually embodied and handed forward to subsequent generations by secular social institutions....<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, through examining some of the issues that Weber raises, some of which are related to aspiring for status, it can be seen that religious tradition itself led to the persistent drive for status.

This thesis will argue that the aspiring for status, as augmented by the religious sanctification of the work ethic, has helped to create our present-day crisis in the United States. This idea of aspiring for status has been assimilated into societal institutions and business interests to keep the people in their place and a few in control of most political and economic power. The acceptance of aspiring for status into the United States' socio-economic structure has encouraged individuals to strive for status by competing against other human beings. Finally, this competition has made it impossible to create a viable community since it is affected by the damaging consequences of those individuals who aspire for status. This effect on the community can be seen in the writings of Amos


the prophet, at least when he attacked the monarchy and the elite for refusing to address the needs of the poor and the needy. Moreover, aspiring for status is challenged today by a theology of liberation whose vision of community is based on love, sharing, and social justice.

Aspiring for status is a hindrance to the development of the concept of liberation theology in the United States, because it is so intertwined in the property-structure existence of a highly industrial society, such as the United States.<sup>2</sup> At least subconsciously this aspiration is aimed at acquiring "the good life" under the influence of ideas of a work ethic that can be traced back to the development of Calvinism during the Reformation period. This idea is being espoused today by certain politicians in the United States.<sup>3</sup> It is also related to an illusion of abundance in an age of scarcity (a problem intensified by media advertising). Aspiring for status perpetuates two related evils in our culture, materialism and egocentric individualism. With this in mind, aspiring for status becomes one of the key elements in a consumer mode of existence where my relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property.<sup>4</sup> This forces the individual to be in constant opposition to societal changes when his or her position or property is threatened by those changes. Erich Fromm's observation of the socio-economic structure can help to cast light on the problem:

...since what one has can be taken away in one form or another, one must have more, in order to fortify one's existence against such danger. If everyone wants to have more everyone must fear one's neighbor's aggressive intention to take away what one has. To prevent such attacks one must become more powerful and preventively aggressive oneself.<sup>5</sup>

The accumulation of wealth and power, as increased by each elevation of one's social status and viewed as blessings from God, are distortions of one's true relationship to others. In To Have Or To Be?, Erich Fromm postulates that in the gospels one finds a central theme that people must free themselves from all greed and craving for possessions and must totally liberate themselves from the structures of having, and conversely, that all positive ethical norms must be rooted in an ethic of being, sharing and solidarity.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Thomas Merton in his writings has suggested that people must fight against the inhumanity of organized affluence by joining with those less fortunate who are excluded from participation in the benefits provided to those who have attained status in our competitive society.<sup>7</sup> The idea of breaking away from aspiring for status to a communal mode of sharing is an approach that would incorporate all persons in the growth of society and their own being.

One way of showing people how to analyze their industrial society is through a methodology known as liberation theology. The theology of liberation is based on an inherent trust that within each man and woman there is a desire for wholeness, for a fuller development of his or her person. Through education there begins the development of one's mind to have a critical perspective on society and life. It is a



method of self-discovery that is part inner-directed, where the individual and community discover they can become the subjects and not objects of economics, politics, and religion. Through liberation theology we free ourselves from the strangu-  
lation of personal greed, a component of aspiring for status, becoming once more relational beings, and realizing that we are responsible for each other if we and our society are to thrive.

The thesis will be divided into five parts. The first part will explain what is aspiring for status. It will examine three ways by which individuals aspire for status, namely, symbolic association, education, and the work-achievement syndrome. In the next section, the work ethic will be examined showing how it evolved out of the Calvinistic concept of calling. The religious sanctification of the work ethic will be seen as an incentive used in aspiring for status.

In the following section, Amos, the prophet, has been chosen as a defender of the poor and needy, and as one who vividly presents what is required if we are to live out the real meaning of life, if we are to have genuine fulfillment. He spoke during a time when Israel was a very affluent society. He challenged those who aspire for status for not living according to the law of the covenant. He saw the denial of the law by the elite as a breakdown in communal responsibility. Amos, as a messenger of Yahweh, demanded that the ruling elite be committed to social justice and that they have a moral respon-

sibility to those less fortunate in their community.

The fourth section is devoted to liberation theology which accepts the biblical vision of social justice as stated by Amos, the prophet, among others, and applies it to the conditions of the people in the United States. It describes the role of the prophetic church and its response to the current crisis in the United States. Along with the prophetic church, liberation theology will be seen as developing a new way of doing social analysis and creating a new social consciousness that demystifies the idea of aspiring for status. Liberation theology also will be viewed as a source of social analysis which is steeped in a biblical vision of community and which acts as a catalyst educating the people into becoming responsible for each other through the re-affirmation of social justice.

The last section will conclude by pointing out some of the consequences of aspiring for status as it affects the present crisis in the United States.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER I

1. Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 164. Also, it is interesting to note in passing that ultra-conservative ministers, such as Reverend Jerry Falwell, today are being quoted in Newsweek magazine as stating, "Material wealth is God's way of blessing people who put him first." The assumption is that one gets rewarded for believing and hard work, while the non-believer is punished for lack of faith and lack of employment.
2. I am using the United States, even though it could apply to other countries, because my living and working experiences are part of that country.
3. It is interesting to note that with the economic downturn in the United States, President Ronald Reagan and his economic advisors are rekindling the idea that the work ethic will bring about prosperity in an age when resources are becoming more scarce.
4. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 24
5. Ibid.; p. 113
6. Ibid., p. 54
7. Thomas Merton, Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1968), p. 256

## CHAPTER TWO - ASPIRING FOR STATUS

Aspiring for status is strongly built into the psychic consciousness of American working men and women. Even with the present economic slump of the Eighties looming ahead, many individuals believe that they can attain social and economic elevation in their status. This concern for status can be understood as an inner drive which includes all kinds of desires, characterized especially by the urge to achieve standing, to "get ahead", to win prestige, recognition, admiration, and respect in the mainstream of American culture.<sup>1</sup> There are many ways of aspiring for status in the United States. I will concentrate on three approaches explaining how they relate to aspiring for status; these modes are symbolic association, education, and the work-achievement syndrome.

Symbolic association is a concept originating out of my readings on status and observing individuals striving for status. It takes on two forms in aspiring for status; one way is to buy into status and the other is by imitating successful persons. Through symbolic association, the idea is to convince an individual that he or she can buy into status that is actually out of reach; yet according to the advertising media it is very much within reach. The emphasis is placed on external symbols of status, such as expensive clothes, new car, large house, and trips away from home that would impress others as marks of success. It is a form of the consumer society



because to consume is one form of having, and the modern consumer may (then) identify himself or herself by the formula: I am equals what I have and what I consume.<sup>2</sup> One problem with this approach to status is that it turns the consumer into a commodity. If one equals what one consumes then the person himself becomes treated as a commodity. The emphasis is then placed on the person's ability to sell himself or herself to another, to manipulate another individual into accepting the external symbols of status as real. Erich Fromm refers to this as a use/exchange value.<sup>3</sup> The person treated as a commodity becomes a form of property. He has the illusion of status, power, and position. There is a tendency for such an individual never to be satisfied with his or her present status; he or she is always looking, striving for something that is beyond his or her reach.

Another form of symbolic association is through imitating successful people. Individuals emulate the characteristics of the successful person. The manner of speech, the type of clothes worn, and physical activities engaged in, such as the prestige sports of tennis or racquetball, function as ways of claiming higher status. Of course, this approach relies also on buying into status because it advances the idea of consuming and competing for something that will be unattainable for the average person. This form of symbolic association is accentuated by the media, especially through the use of advertising on television. Television advertising has used symbolic

association refining it into a tool of exploitation and illusion. The message is that the American dream of success is a reality, yet in truth it is made up of false promises. Advertising on television uses images of successful people to give the illusion that the American dream is accessible to everyone. However, the idea of the successful person is just used to exploit and induce people into buying the products - symbols of status - and not the reality associated with the success image. It must be remembered that symbolic association is used by all people in deluding themselves into thinking that they have more status than they really do. It relies mainly on the external trappings of status and not on the real source of power and position; most people are excluded from the real sources of power, but they have the illusion of participating in it.

Another avenue of status aspiration is through education. Education in the United States is still being promoted as the vehicle by which an individual can aspire to elevate his socioeconomic position in the status hierarchy. Today, one acquires a specialized degree from one of the many colleges and universities throughout the United States to accomplish this goal. However, the educational system performs the dual task of aiding some in social mobility while at the same time working effectively to hinder others. It is used as a weeding-out process, feeding individuals into various programs at an early age, determining who shall succeed and who shall fail

...because hierarchies of success are steeply pyramided as in the United States. The educational system must then teach people how to fail without complaining and how to take out their frustrations against those who have also been taught to fail.<sup>4</sup>

One way of failing is by self-accusation. The individual sees himself as a failure through his own fault. Part of this self-perception is due to the competitive grading system in education. It causes individuals to compete against each other for the top positions in a class. It assumes that some will be successful and others will fail. Those who fail accept this assumption, rationalizing their failure as due to their own stupidity or laziness. They then internalize their defeat by directing their anger against themselves. This creates a situation by which the individual does not realize his own abilities. The failure experienced by many reinforces a self-image that promotes a sense of low self-esteem and self-doubt. The terrible thing about this form of inequality in American society is that it sets up a contest for dignity in which the winner is the one with the higher status position.<sup>5</sup>

Another problem that rises out of putting an emphasis on higher education is that the hiring of formally educated men and women effectively puts a ceiling over the legitimate aspirations of workers who expected to rise to positions of status by advancing through the ranks in their places of work. A good example is the hiring of individuals from outside a company for managerial positions to direct the work of industrial workers, instead of advancing someone from within who under-

stands the problems and needs of the worker. Status aspiration then becomes a product and part of the indoctrination of success conveyed through the educational system. As long as our preoccupation is with attaining status, the values of the school system force us to prove to ourselves and others that we are worthy of the status bestowed upon us by our education. "In such a system, it is assumed that natural superiority and excellence of performance are, along with effort, the keys to high status...."<sup>6</sup> Opportunities are perceived as present for those who want and seek them. It is assumed that with enough education and hard work there are few limitations on an individual's ability to advance.<sup>7</sup> Despite these difficulties many people still preserve the illusion that higher education can insure them their future status aspirations and some work very hard in education to make their goal for status a reality.

The United States is seen as a land of great opportunity for socio-economic elevation of one's status. Social standing in the United States is widely believed to be more a matter of individual achievement than inherited family status.<sup>8</sup> The work-achievement syndrome is composed of "effort" and "drive". Coupled with these two components are the ideas of "hard work", "initiative", and "the ambition to make money".<sup>9</sup>

Effort and drive are two key elements in raising one's status. Those who believe themselves to have risen in status express pride in their accomplishments, even while crediting it (more often than not) to parental push and dreams.<sup>10</sup> In-

dividuals on every level of society struggle to obtain a position of status that is higher than the one they formerly held.<sup>11</sup> If the individual did not possess a college degree, he created a sense of worth by the occupation he worked in. He had a sense of pride in the fact that he had a steady income and a job that he could count on going to tomorrow, as well as today.<sup>12</sup> Status distinction then becomes based on one's occupation. This way of striving for status has been channelled for many Americans in the form of an "effortocracy";

...people who rise in this system are those who have been the most determined to do so, who have put out the greatest efforts towards that end. The people who fail are those who have lacked the character, the will, and the enterprise....<sup>13</sup>

In our culture the healthy person is supposed to work, and we have caused individuals to internalize this belief to such an extent that their inability to work is turned back negatively upon themselves; they judge that either they are sick or they must lack the capabilities. Work is sanctioned and idleness condemned.<sup>14</sup> This competitive environment produces a continuous sense of anxiety for the person. It stirs up old anxieties, that may have been long latent, concerning one's ability to achieve and maintain his own independence.<sup>15</sup>

The emphasis is then placed on working to insure one of moving up the status ladder by being a productive member of society. With work becoming the focus of one's life, the individual striving for status never seems to acquire their desired goal. The result is that working becomes sacred and inactivity

condemned because ultimately the recognition of success through the work-achievement syndrome becomes dependent upon others and is not defined or measured by one's own aspirations or standards that he chooses to use himself.

One further point must be mentioned in regard to status, that is, the aspiring for status is also intensified by occupational stratification in the United States. Occupational stratification, the placement of one person over another, gives the impression that the heightening of one's status is more attainable if the individual is willing to work within his or her occupation. Individuals interested in occupational stratification focus their attention mostly on the question of payoff. Due to this, Americans up and down the scale envy most people whom they individually perceive as occupying a higher position of status.<sup>16</sup> This envy is usually associated with making money because money gives the individual a heightened sense of status. Because of this, aspiring for status has become more associated with one's occupation. Special categories are being created by many individuals within their occupation to increase their own self-image and identity as it affects their position within any given occupation.

The shift of status from one associated with inherited or aristocratic linkage to that of occupation has given the individual a new sense of status and a feeling of upward mobility. The individual now can attain a sense of status by the position he or she holds in the company or in the occupation.<sup>17</sup>

Occupational stratification of classes in American society helps to create an illusion that one can go beyond one's class position.

...the aspirations that an individual holds for upward mobility, in some way must be related to the estimate he has made of his own class position and the class with which he would identify....The conscious attempts of a middle class striver to emulate the behavior of those above him springs from a particular psychological set that he holds towards class. In the same way, the refusal of a lower class person to set his aspirations too high can be viewed as a response to his class situation and what he thinks about his own abilities and chances for success.<sup>18</sup>

Status then becomes based on an occupational level and not on real control over one's work or ownership of property. Even though this shift in status is understood by a few individuals, the vast majority of society, particularly the middle and upper classes who have been taught to compete, still give the drive for status their first priority.

The problem with aspiring for status is that the individual who concentrates on acquiring status will be in competition with others who have their own aspirations for status. This is due to the competitive nature of aspiring for status that assumes there will always be successes and failures. As a result, the quality of life, the sharing, loving, and nurturing aspects of life for these individuals decreases and their vision of the future is narrowed by their demand for more at the expense of the community as a whole. Now the individual has decided to place an emphasis on aspiring for status so that he or she can protect his or her hierarchical position on the status scale.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

1. George H. Crowell, Society Against Itself, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 123
2. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 27
3. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be? is a good resource in looking at the use/exchange value. See also, Jose Miranda, Marx Against The Marxists, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980), pp. 138-40
4. John Curtis Raines, Illusions Of Success, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1975), p. 22
5. Ibid., pp. 68-70
6. Richard P. Coleman and Lee Rainwater, Social Standing In America: New Dimensions Of Class, (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 241
7. Ibid., p. 239
8. Ibid., p. 237
9. Ibid., p. 234
10. Ibid., p. 225
11. Leonard Reissman, Class In American Society, (New York: Free Press, 1959) The first, and most obvious reason for lower aspirations among the lower and working classes is that individuals in those classes are simply being realistic. While those in the middle and upper-classes may have a reasonably good chance of realizing their aspirations, within bounds, those in the lower class do not. Middle and upper-class persons can afford the luxury, so to speak, of holding higher levels of aspiration for success because there is reasonable chance that they will be able to attain them, starting from a "better" class position. Those further down the class scale, on the contrary, encounter a different social and economic reality and it is but reasonable for them to keep from over-aspiring themselves into disappointment and frustration. (363)
12. Colemand and Rainwater, Social Standing In America, p. 45
13. Ibid., p. 241
14. Reissman, Class In American Society, pp. 262-3



15. Ibid., p. 263
16. Coleman and Rainwater, Social Standing In America, p. 31
17. Ibid., Chapter 3
18. Reissman, Class In American Society, p. 140-1

### CHAPTER THREE - THE WORK ETHIC

Working, for twentieth-century man, is a vehicle which supports his existence. It is a necessity, not a form of pleasure or enjoyment where the individual feels that he has contributed his creative energies to the work process.<sup>1</sup> It is something that everyone must do and few people question. It is assumed that everyone wants to work, instead of being supported by a state institution, such as welfare. Working at a job is instilled in each of us through each generation of parents. It takes its form through a concept known as the "work ethic". Our society assures that we will work faithfully at our jobs through an elaborate system of rewards and penalties. Our internal assent to the necessity to work is provided through the work ethic.

The work ethic grew out of the Christian concept of the "calling". During the Middle Ages this usually meant a divine calling to a religious order, but the Reformers extended the doctrine of the calling to all legitimate forms of work, and this in turn evolved into the secular notion known as the work ethic. The evolution of calling into the work ethic grew in large part out of the teachings of John Calvin who broke away from the monastic asceticism of the Medieval church and substituted worldly-asceticism that would bridge the gap between the realm of the sacred and the secular world. In some respects, the Calvinist reformers and the business sector of

society were aware, if not fully consciously, that the co-operation of religion was necessary if a new economic structure was to succeed. In the later phases of the new economic order, groups like the Puritans, who were influenced by Calvinistic teachings on calling, incorporated into calling a standard making the individual a responsible participant in this world. The Puritans' idea of calling has evolved into today's idea of the work ethic in the United States and since the coming of the Puritans to this country, various new sectarian groups arriving in the United States have strengthened the concept of the work ethic.

The religious sanctification of aspiring for status as seen in the development of the work ethic began to take root during the Medieval era. During this period the role of the Catholic church in society was challenged by groups of reformers within the Church. The Reformers challenged the medieval closed economic system as perpetuated by the Church. In their view, the Church was controlling prices and becoming involved in the act of usury. Instead of condemning the practice of usury, the Church modified and elaborated on the reasons for usury.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the religious attitude adopted towards the world of social institutions and economic relations was one of a monastic asceticism. The Church drew the people into the sacred. This idea of a monastic asceticism attempted to free the person from the economic spheres of influence. For the average person a sense of indifference prevailed;

there was a tendency to take economic interests for granted, or even ignore them, or have no concern for them. The individual's main concern was the saving of his or her soul through self-control in activities instituted by religion.

The Protestant Reformation in Europe established a new relationship between the secular (business) and religious realms. With the economy in transformation due to the increase of commercial activity, the development of urban areas caused a shift in economic power and saw the rise of new social groups who were unwilling to accept the economic constraints imposed by the Church. The feudal tradition and papal power were being challenged by the Reformers.

The monopoly claimed by the Church in every department of life came more and more to gall as corruption spread within the Church itself. The rank abuse of the systems of indulgences and the powers of the Papacy caused wide disaffection.<sup>3</sup>

The role of religion was in the process of evolving from a prevailing monastic idea by which the Church controlled the lives of the faithful to a this-worldly-asceticism where the faithful became active participants in this world.

One thing was unquestionably new: the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs was the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This it was which inevitably gave everyday worldly activity a religious significance, and which first created the conception of a calling in this sense....The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling.<sup>4</sup>

As the Church's critique of the economic order changed,

theologians developed a friendly relationship to business. This relationship encouraged a shift in religious asceticism. The move from a monastic asceticism which was shrouded in piety and privatism to a this-worldly-asceticism began the thrust of the work ethic. The spiritual life of the people was removed from the control of the Papacy and given to themselves by the Reformers. The individual could no longer rely on the Church for salvation; he or she was now accountable directly to God for his or her life. The Reformed faith made incumbent upon all its adherents a new kind of asceticism, this-worldly rather than other-worldly as in the monastic idea. This asceticism took the form of a discipline imposed by the will of God, and to be undergone in the punctual discharge of secular duties.<sup>5</sup> It taught that every Christian, and not just clergymen, people who belonged to religious orders, should regard his (or her) occupation as a vocation which he (or she) should pursue in response to the "call" of God.<sup>6</sup> The idea of "calling" was taught by many of the Reformers, but John Calvin's theological interpretation of "calling"<sup>7</sup> had an influence on numerous religious groups that would help in the development of the business community and later on become the foundation for the Christian community in the creation of the United States of America.

The concept of calling refers to the idea that the individual has a moral obligation to take part in worldly affairs. In them he should work conscientiously as if in the sight of

God. He was to seek to produce what would be useful for the community. He was not to be idle nor was he to spend in selfish or luxurious fashion the fruits of his labours.<sup>8</sup> The calling is not a condition in which the individual is born, but a strenuous and exacting enterprise, to be undertaken, indeed, under the guidance of Providence, but to be chosen by each man for himself with a deep sense of his solemn responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> The only way of living that was acceptable to God was not to exceed worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. The idea of calling is associated with a society which seeks wealth with the sober gravity of men who are conscious at once of disciplining their characters by patient labor, and of devoting themselves to a service acceptable to God.

The Calvinistic idea of calling was later expanded by his followers to idealize the life of the businessman and the worker as serving God and developing the soul.

"...success in business is in itself almost a sign of spiritual grace, for it is a proof that a man has labored faithfully in his vocation, and that "God has blessed his trade". Next to saving his soul, (the trademan's) care and business is to serve God in his calling, and to drive it as far as it will go."<sup>10</sup>

A new worldly asceticism has now challenged the old religious beliefs of the medieval theologians. The belief and practice of religion took a new direction through one's calling which became the highest form of a moral obligation demanding that

the individual fulfill his duty in worldly affairs. One group that idealized "calling" was the Puritans who along with other arriving Protestant sects ingrained this concept into the development of the work ethic which became part of the American consciousness, as it relates to the development of business and industry.

The Puritans' propagation of Calvinist theological doctrine showed that they viewed the idea of calling not in a fatalistic manner where everything seemed uncontrolled by the individual, but with a sense of moral responsibility. Being among the "elected" was seen as a sign from God. The rational order of the universe is the work of God, and its plan requires that the individual should labor for God's glory. This approach to one's calling was divided into the spiritual and temporal. It is the duty of the Christian to know and believe in God; it is by faith that he will be saved. However, the only genuine faith is the faith which produces work. One is judged according to one's fruit; are you a doer or a taker. The Christian is to labor in the affairs of practical life, but is subordinate to God. It then follows that there is to be no withdrawal from the world, but the conscientious discharge of the duties of business, which is among the loftiest of religious and moral virtues.<sup>11</sup>

In economic life this outlook was conducive to the utmost thrift and industry. Money and goods were neither to be wasted nor trusted.

Honesty, thrift, industry, and diligence, the outward signs of the inward sense of vocation, are combined with simplicity and frugality of living, which are the virtues of the sober man living the "ascetic" ideal in the world. This combination tends to foster economic success, whether desired or not.<sup>12</sup>

When thrift was coupled with the zealous activity of Christians who saw in diligent performance of their work a service of God, and in success a sign of election, a combination was produced which could powerfully affect the economic developments of the age. Many Puritans belonged to the rising business class, and through their efforts and thrift undoubtedly accelerated the pace of the expanding capitalist development.<sup>13</sup> This heightened status striving expressed in economic pursuits assumed that the individual's economic interest was in the best interest of the community. As calling became secularized, this encouraged the exploitation of others in the economic world. Puritanism in its later phases added a halo of ethical sanctification to the appeal of economic expediency, and offered a moral creed, in which the duties of religion and the calls of business ended their long estrangement in an unanticipated reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

The work ethic as augmented by calling originated in the conviction that the world, despite its imperfections, could acquire religious significance as an object through which the individual fulfilled his duties in rational behavior. Moreover, one's vocation (calling) need not be fixed<sup>15</sup> and was not incompatible with future changes in status.



...the Puritan Baxter praised what nowadays is called "social mobility" within the framework of an economy based on exchange and on the division of labour. In this way the accomplishment of one's vocation (calling) was translated into professional diligence and spirit of initiative; and social advancement (measured no longer by the medieval hierarchy of classes, but by increase of property and development of economic enterprise) was now regarded as a divine blessing and sign of election.<sup>16</sup>

The Calvinist-Puritan form of Christianity enabled the spirit of capitalism and entrepreneurship to spread rapidly among the class of manufacturers and merchants. Along with this, it supplied an inner drive to the lower classes inspiring them to rise above their present standing. Today, this can be seen in the surge of Christian renewals.

Each new wave of Protestant revival and renewal has supplied a rising class with new self-confidence and a religious sense of discipline that enables them to rise in the existing social and economic system.... More recently, research has shown that new Christian sects, such as the Pentecostals, still perform the same social function.<sup>17</sup>

They supply people of the lower classes, devoid of formal education, with a new spiritual self-confidence, transforming them into disciplined, hard working, and reliable persons, and thus enable them to do well as industrial workers, or to become successful business persons in a competitive world by rising on the social scale.<sup>18</sup> This idea of calling as strengthened by the work ethic has become part of our national psyche so that without it our society would begin to falter.

With the evolution of divine calling, religion and traditional obstacles have been removed to make way for a secularization of divine calling that is more worldly and less

religious in nature.. The religious sanctification of aspiring for status as seen in the work ethic grows out of a distorted view of calling from what was taught by the Reformers. The distortion of the Christian tradition receives religious sanctification on the American holiday known as Labor Day. At this time, the expressed value is sanctified in the American culture, that is, the exploitation of each other for personal gains in social status. This idea of the work ethic can be seen in the words of President Richard M. Nixon reaffirming the sanctity of the work ethic to a group of people on Labor Day, 1971:

"The 'work ethic' holds that labor is good in itself; that a man or woman becomes a better person by virtue of the act of working. America's competitive spirit, the 'work ethic' of this people, is alive and well on Labor Day, 1971."<sup>19</sup>

Working hard then became the external requirement of one's calling. This supposedly contributed to good results - the new legalism - which was seen by many as God's blessings on those who contributed to society. Eventually as society became complex and the division of labor more specialized, looking for God's approval for working hard began to disappear and to be replaced by the approval of society. The culture substituted for religious values those of its own which were associated with the advancement of the individual through competition for social status. The work ethic now took on a spiritual value in relationship to aspiring for status. The work ethic became the avenue through which the individual

could aspire for status. The work ethic which began as a religious concept in the doctrine of calling is now secularized as it reenforces aspiring for status. The shift now completed, the individual relies less on God's approval as mediated by the Christian community and his calling. The individual is now viewed by a secular community which gives approval to his personal accomplishments which are outward signs of his success and acceptance by society for his hard work and efforts. The present-day sanctified work ethic now involves the striving for status against each other, including economic expediency which enables people to aspire for status, moving away from the original idea of calling and contributing very little to the community.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

1. There are some highly skilled occupations where the individual enjoys what he or she is doing. In John Curtis Raines, Illusions Of Success, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1975) makes this observation about creative jobs:  
"What is interesting is that the most prestigious jobs are not necessarily those that pay the most, but those which reflect the greatest internal substance and accomplishment...jobs desired are those that refer to a life lived from the strength and fullness of one's insides - protected and comforted from the relentlessly measuring process. (24) But, for the majority of workers, they are "wage earners" in a system of deference set up to service wealthy owners." (27)
2. The relationship between commercial activity and calling are closely interrelated. For an in-depth look at usury and the commercial enterprises of the Reformation period, I recommend R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1926; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962). Also, John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity: Interpreted Through Its Development, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954) shows that Calvin was quite aware of the relationship between religion and commerce. In Protestant Christianity, the authors show that the medieval feudal economy was rapidly giving way to embryonic capitalistic forms of economic organization, particularly in the areas in which Calvinism appeared. Calvin's sympathy with the new forces was indicated by his willingness to permit, with strict qualifications, the charging of interest (a practice uniformly prohibited, though also widely practiced, by the medieval church; it was frowned upon by Luther). This concession, and the attitude which it symbolized meant that commercial enterprise was no longer to be suspected as inherently evil, but was properly a field for the fulfillment of one's religious duty. (234)
3. Marquis W. Child and Douglas Carter, Ethics In A Business Society, (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 21
4. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 80
5. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. 241
6. Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity: Reformation To The Present, Volume II, (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 979

17. For the theological interpretation of John Calvin's concept of calling, I refer the reader to John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume II, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953), Book Three, Chapter XXIV.
8. Latourette, A History of Christianity, p. 979
9. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. 241
10. Ibid., p. 246
11. Ibid., p. 240
12. Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, Christian Ethics, (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1955), p. 305
13. Dillenberger and Welch, Protestant Christianity, pp. 105-6
14. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, pp. 239-40
15. Even though the Puritans may have encouraged upward mobility in their later phase, John Calvin felt that one's calling was fixed and one could not aspire to transcend his or her position in life. For a further development of one's calling according to the teachings of John Calvin, I refer the reader to John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume I, Book Three, Chapter X, part 6.
16. Julio De Santa Ana et al., Separation Without Hone: The Church and the Poor during the Industrial Revolution and Colonial Expansion, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 91. Also, in Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, he states that one can see that the individual's calling could in one sense prevent him from fulfilling himself as a person. One's calling is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists, in particular no matter whether it appears on the surface as a utilization of his personal powers, or only of his material possessions (as capital). (51) Beach and Niebuhr in Christian Ethics points out how restricted one's calling can be. (290)
17. Byran Wilson, Religion In Secular Society, (London: Pelican Books, 1969), pp. 43, 210-11 and 219-20
18. Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 152. A good example of this is the way Amway Corporation blends in religion and business into being a successful person.
19. Studs Terkel, Working, (New York: Avon Books, 1974), p. xi

#### CHAPTER FOUR - THE PROPHET AMOS

Too often the quest for the "good life" becomes the principal goal of existence, a goal to be achieved even at the expense of others. Behind this striving there is the tendency to categorize and to rank people in some kind of social scale. Status hierarchies rest upon the accepted social prestige given to persons for various attainments within the community. Moreover, status groups seek to monopolize the goods, the opportunities, and the symbols that confer honor so as to maximize the social distance between themselves and others.<sup>1</sup> The desire to gain social status and power and to acquire private property creates an atmosphere where violence<sup>2</sup> is used overtly or covertly in order for select groups to maintain their control over others. The selfishness this system generates makes people value personal success more highly than social responsibility.

This situation is not something new; we can look back to Israel of the eighth century B.C.E. for examples of the negative impact of status hierarchies. With the growth of trade and commerce in Israel and the increasing power and corruption of the monarchy, the socio-economic disparity increased between the rich and the poor. During this time of social strife, there appeared among the people a prophetic voice that challenged the socio-economic-political order:

He blazes our ruin on the stronghold  
and brings destruction to the fortress.

Trouble for those who turn justice into wormwood,  
throwing integrity to the ground;  
who hate the man dispensing justice at the city gate  
and detest those who speak with honesty.  
Well then, since you have trampled on the poor man,  
extorting levies on his wheat-  
those houses you have built of dressed stone,  
you will never live in them;  
and those precious vineyards you have planted,  
you will never drink their wine.  
For I know that your crimes are many,  
and your sins enormous:  
persecutors of the virtuous, blackmailers,  
turning away the needy at the city gate.  
No wonder the prudent man keeps silent,  
the times are so evil. (Amos 5:9-13)<sup>3</sup>

These are the words of the prophet Amos who intervened on behalf of Yahweh demanding that social justice be carried out in accordance with covenant law. Amos reminded the rich man of his responsibility and, to an increasing degree, of his guilt. He is commanded by Amos to transform his success into a blessing for his fellow-countrymen; he is challenged by Amos to oppose the widening gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>4</sup> The injustice, the mercilessness, the oppression, and the exploitation to which all cultures have learned to resign themselves are precisely what Yahweh wanted to abolish in the world.<sup>5</sup> It is for these reasons that the prophets, such as Amos, were of such importance in the quest of social justice in ancient Israel and are now in our present-day civilization.

Gustavo Gutierrez, in his book A Theology of Liberation states that poverty is not caused by fate; it is caused by the actions of those whom the prophets condemned. He then goes on to quote Amos:

These are the words of the Lord:

For crime after crime of Israel  
I will grant them no reprieve  
because they sell the innocent for silver  
and the destitute for a pair of shoes.  
They grind the heads of the poor into the earth  
and thrust the humble out of their way...(Amos 2:6-7)<sup>6</sup>

In the process of change from that of a nomadic tribe<sup>7</sup> to the formation of the monarchy, Israel modified the law of the covenant. The formation of the monarchy put the king between Yahweh and the people. The monarchy reinterpreted traditional customs by setting up a "law of the kingdom" where a covenant was made between the people and the king.<sup>8</sup> This consolidation of power, with the help of the military was the beginning of a social class developed by merchants, large landowners, and the court of the monarchy. A division of wealth was begun that would lead to a division between the rich and the poor.

The older homogenous economic structure of Israel gave way to sharp distinctions of wealth and privilege.... The result was the stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor...<sup>9</sup>

During this period one of the strongest voices for social justice was the prophet Amos who came along to challenge the authority of the monarchy, to condemn the economic disparity of the time, and to remind the people of their allegiance to Yahweh as it was written in the covenant.

Amos spoke to a nation proud of its military strength, untroubled by any immediate external threat and confident of the future. He addressed an affluent society which enjoyed every luxury money could buy. Yet it was a sick society with the privileged at the top and the helpless poor at the bottom



of the economic scale. The rich were not only indifferent to the plight of the poor; they missed no opportunity to crowd them, cheat them, and rob them of their rights.<sup>10</sup> He addressed the oppression and cheating of the poor by attacking the way the judicial system was controlled by the rich so that the poor were denied justice (Amos 2:6-8; 3:9-11; 5:10-12; 8:4-6). He showed how the enjoyment of life by the upper class at the expense of the poor would lead to the destruction of the nation (Amos 4:1-3; 6:1-7).

For Amos atrocities represent violation of the universally valid law of his God. The key term designating the punishable offences is "crimes".... All of the cases specified involve infractions of property and personal rights, deeds which deliberately violate communal standards.<sup>11</sup>

The most basic transgression against the communal standard was the perversion of justice just mentioned: judges who perversely ruled against the debtor and in favor of the creditors. As already seen before, Amos 5:7, 10-11<sup>12</sup> pointed to the fact that the judges were bribed by the creditors to rule in their behalf.

Bribery leads to declaring the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent....As the oppressed innocents, the "poor" become the truly "righteous" in Israel. The expression "in the gate" shows that in the whole of Amos 5:12 it is the local judiciary proceeding which is in view, as in Amos 5:7 and 10. "To turn aside" usually has as its direct object "justice". In his abbreviated form of the usual expression, however, Amos sees immediately that it is the poor themselves who are laid low, who are denied access to their right.<sup>13</sup>

The law of the covenant was violated because the innocent were sentenced by corrupted judges.

You shall not deprive the poor man of justice in his suit. Avoid all lies, and do not cause the death of the innocent and the guiltless; for I the Lord will never acquit the guilty. You shall not accept a bribe, for bribery makes the discerning man blind and the just man give a crooked answer. (Ex. 23:6-8).

Amos reproached the judges for selling their judgments for money, or for as little as a pair of sandals, so that their verdicts went against the innocent and poor, who did not have the means to bribe the judge even if they perversely wanted to do so.<sup>14</sup> Justice is distorted because of the toleration of false testimony and bribery. The obvious connection was that the judges and the rich have joined together to squeeze the poor. The directness with which Amos determined guilt, solely on the basis of behavior manifested towards the weak and the helpless is a strong feature of his prophecy....The cause of the helpless is a priori the cause of Yahweh.<sup>15</sup>

Amos furthers his attack on the people by indicting the wealthy for the violence they perpetrate against the poor.

...look at the tumult seething among her people  
and at the oppression in her midst;  
what do they care for honesty  
who hoard in their palaces the gains  
of crime and violence? (Amos 3:10)

The people of Samaria did not know how to do what is right.<sup>16</sup>

The expensive living of the rich together with intoxication, merrymaking, and the disintegration of the rule of the law led to the injustice toward the poor, even including acts of violence. Justice, righteousness, and faithfulness were missing from the lives of the rich. In Amos' mouth the term

"right" (honesty) signified what should have been the acceptable practice of the courts and merchants. However this concept was missing from the behavior of the wealthy in Samaria. In all probability, Amos was denouncing the manner and way in which Canaanite culture was assimilated into the capital city of Israel.

The activity denounced by Amos probably reflects the manner and way in which Canaanite culture has developed its methods of ruling, conducting business and administering the law in the capital city of Israel. The manipulations of Canaanite officialdom will have had a determining influence upon the authoritative Israelite circles. Thus the capital was the center and source of the ever-spreading social abuses.<sup>17</sup>

Commentators on Amos agree in describing the terrible abuses involved. For instance H. W. Wolff states:

Acts of violence against the poor were abuses illustrated through the harassment and exploitation of the people for profitable results. One way this was represented was in the furnishings in the homes of the ruling class (Amos 3:12b, 15; 5:11; 6:4b).<sup>18</sup>

E. Hammershaibm lists other abuses:

The purchasing of expensive wines for drinking bouts bought with money collected in fines from the poor, or wine that had been seized by the creditor because the debtor did not have the money to pay the fine.<sup>19</sup>

Hammershaibm continues by mentioning that,

the women of Samaria or, as Amos refers to them, the "cows of Bashan" (Amos 4:1), shared in the guilt of impoverishing and oppressing the poor. Through their extravagance and luxury they compelled their husbands to provide them at the expense of those more poorly placed.<sup>20</sup>

and again Wolff mentions that

through forms of exploitation, they have imported murder and robbery into their homes,

in the forms of their luxurious living and furnishings.<sup>21</sup>

Their abusive social attitude and behavior along with their self-indulgent life style were forms of oppression imposed on the poor and needy. The violence as seen by Amos was an attack on the life and limb of those who could not afford the luxuries of the rich. The rich could buy through bribery or murder the economic and social status of wealth. The affluent class of Israel in obtaining a controlling influence over the people had forsaken the idea of "right" (Proverbs 14:13; 22:16; 28:3). The norms which ought to have governed the affairs of men in Israel under Yahweh dropped out of sight and consciousness among Samaria's leading citizens. The older ways of social life in Israel were displaced by Canaanite social customs.

Amos is no ascetic in his attack on the residence-towers, nor simply an Israelite chauvinist attacking foreign ways. What is alone of moment to him is the departure from an order of society which was formed according to Yahweh's will and which maintained every Israelite one with the other in a system of mutual responsibility. In Samaria the strongholds had become treasuries in which the powerful stored away the profits of 'violence' against others and of 'destruction' of rightful customs (cf. violence and destruction in Jer. 6:7; 20:8; 48:3; Ezek 45:9; Hab. 1:3).<sup>22</sup>

The first pronouncement of judgment by Yahweh on the Israelites is seen in Amos 5:24. Verse 24 is a call demanding justice and righteousness.

In Amos mišpāt (justice) is specifically associated with the court in the gates and means the judicial process and its decisions by which right order is maintained in social relations, and especially the protection of the weak and poor through the help of the court. Sedāqā (righteousness) is the right-

ness that belongs to those who fulfill the responsibilities which their relationship to others involved.<sup>23</sup>

In effect Amos is saying that the worship of the cultic community is unacceptable because Israel does not live as the community of Yahweh. They are to desert the sanctuaries, renew righteousness by recognizing and fulfilling their responsibilities to their neighbors, and see that that rightness bears fruit in the justice of the courts.<sup>24</sup> But let justice flow like water, and integrity like an unfailing stream (Amos 5:24) and then the worship of the community is acceptable. No longer will there be the threat of judgment and punishment for transgressions against the poor. This idea has a parallel in Isaiah 1:10-17, where the prophet after a powerful utterance against the sacrifices of the people ends by demanding that they should cease from evil and instead care for what is right.<sup>25</sup> Amos' pronouncement of judgment by Yahweh is reflected in his perception of the perversion of "justice", that is, the proper functioning of judicial procedures that take place "in the gate" which were being abused by the rich at the expense of the poor (Amos 5:10-15).<sup>26</sup>

The courts were used to exploit the weak. That is why Amos in 5:7, 10-15 states that "justice" is turned upside down and righteousness is brought to the ground. Verse 7 has been written describing the current justice as "wormwood". In this image, justice instead of bringing well-being to the whole community has poisoned it (Amos 6:12).<sup>27</sup> In verse 7

the prophet uses the metaphor of the bitterness of wormwood to describe the perverted justice he saw around him. "Righteousness" designated behavior which is in keeping with this order, e.g., the willingness of one who himself is legally "in the right" to stand up in defense of another who is "in the right" but has been unjustly accused.<sup>28</sup> However both verses 7 and 10 are directed against the judges. The judges have broken the law by accepting bribes from the rich, by means naturally of extra payments to themselves, while the poor have not the means to persuade the judge to judge justly.<sup>30</sup> Accepting of bribes by those whose task it is to determine which party is in the right led to finding the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent (Ex. 23:6-8; Deut. 16:18-20). Amos thought first and foremost of the performance of duties to the oppressed and wronged, and of aid to the needy (cf. Isaiah 1:17).<sup>30</sup> It is here that the Israelite aristocracy failed to perform its duty to the poor and the needy. Instead it formed an alliance with the judiciary where both exploited the oppressed at the expense of Israel's social order. By violating the expression of justice and righteousness through the courts, they ignored the requirements of Yahweh's covenant with Israel; for violating these sanctions, they will be punished by Yahweh.

That the rich got richer and the poor got poorer was inevitable in Israel in the eighth century. The elite of Samaria and Judah (Amos 2:4) felt comfortable in their role as rulers of the people. They had corrupted the role of justice at the

gate, they lived expensively to the detriment of the lower class, and they became self-centered and indulged in all forms of pleasure because the aristocracy had created a false consciousness of being a potentially superior people.

...leadership abused the underprivileged (Amos 4:1 and 3:9-10). The oppressed were made to suffer, while the oppressors loll about, indulging their appetites for food, wine, and frivolity.<sup>31</sup>

With the affluence of the wealthy came an inactivity with regard to the state of the nation and concern for those less fortunate than themselves. This can be seen in Amos 6:8, where the 'pride of Jacob' is the object of Yahweh's abhorrence.

The 'pride of Jacob' speaks of Israel's preening national self-confidence which has become the real center and concern of the nation's upper classes. Yahweh loathes this pride as one abhors an unclean thing because they regarded their national destiny as the work of their own hands (Amos 6:1 and 13) and because it was expressed in an indulgent luxury which ignored the unfortunate. Pride in Israel meant the displacement of Yahweh as the foundation of their national existence and led to a casual disobedience of his lordship over them.<sup>32</sup>

"Pride" and "arrogance" are cited in proverbial wisdom as being the way to destruction (Prb. 16:18) and as being something which Yahweh "hates" (Prb. 8:13).<sup>33</sup> The Israelites' sense of security and of being a chosen people was being challenged by Amos when he addressed the wrongdoings of the wealthy (Amos 6:3-8. 12-13; 8:4-7). Through Israel's arrogance, the elite had perverted the order of justice, robbed the poor through the use of false weights and measures and developed a false sense of security by abandoning the way of

righteousness as it concerns the poor and needy.

To Amos, who will allow Israel no other identity and way of life than that given her in the election of Yahweh, such a reversal of things staggers the mind, and he can only compare it to some incredible perversion of the normal order of things. And with this argumentative saying he seeks to make the leaders of the nation see their deeds as Yahweh sees them.<sup>34</sup>

Those who gain through the misery of others by controlling the economic realm for their own gains will in the end lose everything gained by distorting the economic relationship with their fellow persons. The weak and unfortunate are not to be exploited; they should be treated with the respect and concern due to kinsmen and neighbors. Amos throughout his writings<sup>35</sup> spoke to a group who were steadily pressing the weaker citizenry to the limits of existence. As a result of such behavior Yahweh would bring judgment against the oppressor and protect the oppressed.



FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

1. Leonard Reissman, Class In American Society, (New York: Free Press, 1959), p. 65
2. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 80
3. The Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 1483-4
4. Conrad Boerman, The Rich, The Poor - And The Bible, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), p. 16
5. José Miranda, Marx and the Bible, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1974), p. 168
6. Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1971), pp. 292-3
7. The concept of the Israelites developing their nation from a nomadic tribe is a disputed point among biblical scholars. Roland De Vaux, The Early History Of Israel and others will accept the nomadic tribe theory, but G. Mendenhall, The Tenth Generation and Norman Gottwald, The Tribes Of Israel question it and make the denial of nomadism a cornerstone of their theories. Gottwald does an article on nomadism in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume, pp. 629-31. This does not contradict the view that the establishment of the monarchy was a backward step from earlier ideals. G. Mendenhall, The Tenth Generation, Chapter VII would help clarify all this and he definitely considers monarchy as a step backward.
8. Bruce Vawter, C.M., The Conscience Of Israel, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 69
9. James Luther Mays, Amos: A Commentary, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 2-3
10. John Bright, Covenant And Promise, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 83
11. Hans Walter Wolff, Joel and Amos, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 152-3
12. When Amos 5:7, 10-11 refers to "they", those who dispense justice in the courts are meant.
13. Wolff, Joel and Amos, pp. 248-9

14. Erling Hammershaimb, The Book of Amos: - A Commentary, (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 46
15. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 172
16. Mays, Amos, p. 64
17. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 194
18. Ibid., p. 194
19. Hammershaimb, The Book of Amos, p. 48
20. Ibid., p. 65
21. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 194
22. Mays, Amos, p. 65
23. Ibid., p. 108
24. Ibid., p. 108
25. Hammershaimb, The Book of Amos, p. 91
26. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 245
27. Hammershaimb, The Book of Amos, p. 80
28. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 245
29. Hammershaimb, The Book of Amos, p. 84
30. Ibid., p. 84
31. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 275
32. Mays, Amos, p. 118
33. Wolff, Joel and Amos, p. 282
34. Mays, Amos, p. 121
35. Amos is but one example of the biblical concern for social justice. In Genesis 18:19 this concern is present as the way of the Lord: "Indeed I have singled him (Abraham) out that he may direct his sons and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord may carry into effect for Abraham the promises he made about him." Other examples concerning social justice can be found in 1 Kings 21, Isaiah 1:16-17, Habakkuk 1:4, Micah 1:8 and Matthew 5:1-12, the Sermon on the Mount.

## CHAPTER FIVE - LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology has become a stimulus used for social change in North America for the past decade. It is an approach to understanding one's experiences as they relate to the social-political-economic structures of one's country.

...experience is the starting point, the primary data with which social analysis works. However, "experience" involves more than the "empirical" -that which can be measured quantitatively. It involves the "experiential", in the sense of the total person - mind and body, senses and heart. Peoples' myths and visions are indicative of their beliefs and values at the deepest level.<sup>1</sup>

Also, by using the bible as a source of social criticism, clergy and lay persons involved in liberation theology can use the prophetic challenge to criticize the disparities that exist between the working poor and needy and the controlling rich class. Moreover, liberation theology is centered in a biblical belief that God calls upon us actively to participate in the social-political-economic changes of this world. It is an approach to freeing the individual from personal and structural oppression. Liberation theology takes the position that we are subjects and creators of this world. This means that the individual is alive and authentic in relating to the world and to other human beings.

This liberation theology makes use of the Gospel as well as the prophetic writings. The idea of Jesus as liberator moves us beyond our personal limitations and calls us to risk leaving behind our material comforts as we unite ourselves

with those who suffer injustice and oppression in our society. As Christians liberate themselves and others from social injustices, they should realize that the institutional church itself is required to become a liberating force. The Church has been experienced by people too long as a superficial institution, instead of a depth community in which everyone participates. This has caused it to be ignored as a force of liberation.

Today, the Church hears the powerful opening oracles of the book of Amos in company with the ancient people of God and in the midst of the modern world of nations. The same demand here confronts both the Church and the secular world. For the sake of Jesus Christ, however, the Church is more rigorously called to account if it despises weakness, violates the right of the defenseless, and forgets the fate of oppressed people. The Church has no right to feel more secure about its future than do various political powers, for if the Church fails to measure its own performance by the standard of God's compassion, shown by his intervention on behalf of the oppressed, the Church has no future at all.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the Church has a moral responsibility to challenge oppression in all forms and to help instill social justice in a country (USA) that puts personal and material gains before the welfare of its poor and needy.

In order to understand the social and political structures that oppress ourselves and others, the development of a social analysis is essential for identifying and analyzing the dynamics of these structures. The results of social analysis must be brought face to face with particular elements of one's lived experiences as they relate to the local, regional, national, and international patterns of exploitation and

oppression. Reflection on these experiences helps one to become aware of the broad patterns of life within a capitalist system and to begin to articulate the systemic connections among different experiences of exploitation and oppression.<sup>3</sup> This analysis challenges many of the institutions of our society which, like prisons, tend to control our behavior and ideas. Because of this, there is a need to liberate the person from the control of institutional thinking. With a clearer analysis of institutional oppressions, myths and built-in imbalances of our society can be changed. For this reason liberation theology is effective as a method of reflecting on the experience of oppression in the light of the word of God. Furthermore, it is in touch with the Gospel as a model for living life and for letting the works of God become the hope for liberation in the United States.

The idea of involving people in societal change can be understood through praxis... "the interaction of deed and thought and the critical relationship between theory and practice whereby each is dialectically influenced and transformed by the other."<sup>4</sup> Where other concepts of reform of society attempt to preserve the status quo or limit participation, and do not change the institutional structures, the dialectic view of social analysis is quite radical as a transformative, interdependent, participative approach to changing society.

There is a time linkage between past, present, and future, but it is a dialectical linkage whereby one stage emerges from another through a process

of creative conflict. According to this view of social analysis all parts of society are related to all other parts. This requires direct input from communities of ordinary people into the key decisions of our society - those in the political, economic, and cultural arenas... Society is constructed in dialogue, shaped by community, and grows out of its members' dreams, myths, and visions.<sup>5</sup>

This approach has been further expanded by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot in Social Analysis when they state, "How we see a problem determines how we respond to it." It is an effort to see the wider picture and to initiate action that effects more profound social change. This is referred to as the "circle of praxis" because it emphasizes the on-going relationship between reflection and action.<sup>6</sup> This process keeps the community informed, helps to define the issues, devises strategies for action, and can be used to evaluate the results. This is done by many groups of people who share their talents and resources with each other.

Aspiring for status, as part of the American experience, must be understood by clergy and lay persons involved in liberation theology. One way of investigating the aspiration for status is through its development as part of the social consciousness in the United States' culture. What are the dynamics that continue to influence the individual to aspire for status beyond his or her social class? In contemporary American capitalism, social myths function as a complex and indirect system of rationalizations, which spontaneously arise out of the productive process itself and are later sharpened by cultural institutions into a formal ideology encompassing

attempts to legitimate structures of injustice.<sup>7</sup>

The acceptance of aspiring for status encourages individuals to compete against each other. Unfortunately, the individuals competing are from the same social class and not economically separate from each other. It is not the classic example of the rich versus the working class, but the working class competing against itself with the individual trying to enhance his or her own status position. This effort at getting ahead is in some ways controlled by the wealthy through the use of the system of communication, both the visual media and the print media. This gives the wealthy important forums through which they can influence the majority of the people in regard to the ideas of status and success in the United States.

The late Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed the interesting theory that the controlling social classes maintain their power not first by politics and force (although these instruments are available), but by "culture hegemony". By controlling cultural institutions which condition social imagination, elites are able to build a network of perceptions and judgments which paralyze and divide a society's ordinary people.<sup>8</sup>

These forms of control instill in one the idea of worth and the probability of success. They condition individuals as to how they should act and look if they are to succeed. Moreover, these controls determine how individuals will fail to obtain their desired status because of their sex or ethnic background. They also influence perceptions on how certain ethnic groups relate to each other. Those who control ideas and entertainment through cultural institutions, such as the

movies, the theatre, and television, believe that they are serving the needs of the general public. However, to groups that are trying to develop a sense of self-worth along with an ethnic heritage, the control of the flow of ideas as they relate to themselves or others is seen as a way of manipulating the public into perceiving one group or set of ideas as worthy while another is seen as worthless or dangerous. An example is labelling or stereotyping, a way of separating individuals from one another. This form of alienation (or manipulation) creates friction which causes individuals to fight among themselves, instead of attacking the issues that national institutions create to keep working people in their place.

The control of information is further used by various media to create a situation where individualism and materialism become the main concerns of American society. The more things one acquires, the more one is cut off from the other, and the more fearful one becomes of another. This form of individualism and materialism is entirely self-centered. It refers not just to one's behavior, but to one's whole character.

It means that I want everything for myself; that possessing, not sharing, gives me pleasure; that I must become greedy because if my aim is having, I am more the more I have; that I must feel antagonistic towards all others; my customers whom I want to deceive, my competitors whom I want to destroy, my workers whom I want to exploit. I can never be satisfied, because there is no end to my wishes; I must be envious of those who have more and afraid of those who have less.<sup>9</sup>

Individualism and materialism are inconsistent with what is good for the person as well as what is good for the growth



of the society. Therefore fundamental changes in the values and attitudes of people must occur before any real change can take place. This will involve shifting the emphasis that the individual has placed on personal needs which concern only the self to an emphasis that realizes and involves the needs of the whole community. Individualism and materialism can be challenged by demystifying the idea of aspiring for status. The demystification of aspiring for status takes place when concepts, such as prosperity, wealth and economic power, the evolution of technology, and the rising standard of living are analyzed and reappraised in relationship to aspiring for status.

Until recently, Americans believed that prosperity, the continuation of economic growth would never cease. From the end of World War Two until about ten years ago, the American economy did grow at a faster rate than the rest of the world. One of the reasons for this growth was that the country went through the war untouched by the destruction that affected large parts of the world. Also, it contributed to the rebuilding of Western Europe and Japan, thereby increasing its exports without worrying about economic competition from abroad. Along with this, advances in technology helped industries to expand their consumer market due to the great demand made by the public for these goods. These circumstances created a job market that was wide open and one that encouraged many individuals to get ahead by the opportunities that industry presented to them. This created in some the idea that America, at least

viewed from within, was becoming a classless society. It projected an image of openness to all who wanted to take advantage of the opportunities that were made available to them.

The growth of the labor force became a product of a country that had expanded into an empire. During this time, and even more so today, more of the raw materials that the country needed were acquired from abroad. These natural resources were then processed and turned into consumer goods to be exported abroad or sold within the United States. At this time there existed a working balance between labor and business. The former realized a better standard of living and an increase in jobs with better benefits for the worker. The latter saw its profits increased by the supply of cheap raw materials and an increased market for finished goods at home and abroad. Also, the government performed its role by attempting to regulate the laws and controls of the industrial and commercial sectors for the common good of all in the society.<sup>10</sup> With the nation prospering, becoming wealthy and economically powerful in the world market, and with the rise of the standard of living, individuals aspired for status beyond their class. However, today the process of shifting industries from the Midwest and Northeast to the Sunbelt is under way, so that corporations can rid themselves of the high cost of labor and the cost of benefits that are associated with labor, such as medical services, safety programs within the plants, and the cost-of-living allowance, just to name a few. Finally, as the

market expands globally, the corporations become multinationals controlling many facets of the worker's livelihood.

In The Failure Of The American Dream,<sup>11</sup> a group of theologians attempt to demystify concepts associated with the social and economic values and attitudes of the United States culture. Although their report did not directly address the problem of aspiring for status, the values confronted were those that form the foundation to aspiring for status, such as prosperity, wealth and economic power, evolution of technology, and the rising standard of living. An understanding of these concepts becomes clear when we consider the influences which lead people to aspire for status. These influences arise from the socialization process that takes place in the home, at school, and through the media. The socialization process that leads to aspiring for status is colored with various social meanings, depending on one's social position.

The average American worker assumes that he is prosperous. He has a job with good benefits, his standard of living is one of the highest in the world and if he works hard at his job, he will advance within his occupation, thereby gaining a sense of respectability. Of course, he never asks the question, "Whom am I hurting, displacing, or suppressing to get ahead?" He assumes that forces larger than he perform the acts of evil, and that he is just struggling like everyone else around him to get ahead. The question about prosperity is addressed by liberation theology showing that while one

country and its people prosper, another country and its people are being exploited. Economic gains in a status-conscious society can only be made at the expense of other human beings; someone must suffer. In examining the social structures of a status-conscious society, liberation theology shows that the attainment of prosperity does not necessarily have to result in oppression only for those abroad, but that it results in oppression for groups within its own borders as well.

In the view of liberation theologians, the growth of prosperity is limited to those who control the wealth and economy of the United States. The idea that growth leads to prosperity and supports everyone is made on the assumption that an expanding economy benefits all people by being filtered down to everyone from the top to the bottom. Unfortunately, the problem is that the growth of wealth and economic power is concentrated in the hands of a few and what remains is spread out among the rest of the population. This creates tension because those not in the elite sphere must fight for a portion of the assumed surplus.

Even more, the elite seek to monopolize the goods, the opportunities, and the symbols that confer honor so as to maximize the social distance between themselves and others.<sup>12</sup>

Assuming that there is economic growth, the disparity in income between the wealthy and the working class will increase as more of the real wealth, such as real estate, corporate holdings, municipal bonds, cash, insurance, and credit are concentrated more in the hands of the rich.

Furthermore, corporations are investing in new technologies that are capital-intensive so that profits are increased and the work force reduced. This will create a situation where many who have been working continuously will find themselves without jobs, either because of the lack of technical skills for the job or simply because the company needs fewer workers to perform the job. These workers will become part of the marginal poor who will perform some services for industry, but not on a permanent basis.

In fact, 80% of this country's (USA) labor force has little or no control over the labor process, and is wholly dependent for its welfare on the vicissitudes of the labor market. And the number of such people has been growing, not declining, in recent years.<sup>13</sup>

This will put a great stress on the idea of the rising standard of living. With a reduction in the work force, basic services will diminish. Declines in medical care and nutrition will be effected by the concentration of wealth and economic power with the wealthy. Thus, upon those who need medical care the most, our present political economy places the heaviest financial burdens.<sup>14</sup> The basic needs for living will become increasingly expensive for a larger portion of the population. Again, this is tied into the interests of the corporation which assumes that what is good for it is good for the country. The assumption is that if the corporation profits so do the people.

Unfortunately, our corporate elites have proven themselves inefficient managers of both our resources and

our production system. Their single minded concern for profits has led to highly productive use of human labor, but to an inefficient and costly use of capital.<sup>15</sup>

In reality the standard of living as affected by corporate profits diminishes for many because wages and benefits are not in line with the rising inflation that is tied into excessive profits. Also, as long as individuals place their jobs, and positions of status associated with the job, ahead of the needs of the people, society will not better itself; it will only respond to the needs of the few who control the national industries.

Liberation theology must confront the apathetic, conforming, status-conscious structures of society. This environment creates self-alienation in the person because he views his work as meaningless, not for his benefit, but for that of a consumer society. This form of alienation is associated with the hoarding of materialistic and monetary wealth, the obsession with symbolic signs of achievement, and the acceptance of institutional authority. The whole concept of alienation found its first expression in Western thought in the Old Testament concept of idolatry.<sup>16</sup>

The essence of what the prophets call "idolatry" is not that man worships many gods instead of only one. It is that the idols are the work of man's own hands - they are things, and man bows down and worships things; worships that which he has created himself. In doing so he transforms himself into a thing. He transfers to the things of his creation the attributes of his own life, and instead of experiencing himself as the creating person, he is in touch with himself only by the worship of the idol. He

has become estranged from his own life forces, from the wealth of his own potentialities, and is in touch with himself only in the indirect way of submission to life frozen in the idols.<sup>17</sup>

Today, excessive competition on the job and in the aspiring for status contribute to this feeling of alienation. These feelings of competition and aspiring for status are not dealt with by the worker because of the existential decisions that he would have to make concerning his work and life-style. The individual has been conditioned to accept the work ethic as it applies to the competitive nature of work and the attaining of status as it relates to one's life. Because of this situation, the worker is taught not to think or to be creative in reconsidering his work potential as it relates to his life.

In attacking the status-conscious structures of society, liberation theology especially challenges those in control. It reveals to them and the people that the existing order is not in harmony with universal personhood and nature. Its commitment is to a new humanistic change in which power<sup>18</sup> is shared by the community as a whole, instead of being controlled by the few. This constructive change comes into being through confrontation with the contradictions of the work ethic, particularly as these contradictions lead to competition and aspiring for future status; this change will also only come from constant struggling to instill in one's life a sense of meaning. In Markings, Dag Hammarskjöld wrote, "never, 'for the sake of peace and quiet', deny your own experience or convictions."<sup>19</sup> This can be applied to an active life which serves the purpose

of giving the person the opportunity to realize new values by creatively working to bring about social change through social justice.

Liberation theology is God's way of calling into question the evils of the existing order and giving one the energy to move into social justice. This commitment to social justice is seen through the Gospel, particularly as it relates to the poor and the oppressed. It requires that the Gospel not be used in defense of the status quo, but that it be used as a source for social change. The Gospel, as a vehicle of social justice, demands a radical discipleship in the mode of servanthood. For Christians using the Gospel through liberation theology, it is a way of eradicating the injustices that man has brought upon other beings. Christians struggling for social justice show that man has destroyed any covenant that he has with God by violating his divine intention that human beings develop a creative community, instead of exploiting each other. Man's inhumanity takes form through poverty, hunger, illness, marginalization, exploitation, and the loss of dignity to others. The message of social justice in the Gospel is one that transforms unjust attitudes and structures so that society may serve the needs of all people. This approach also demands a critical reflection on our own social, political, and personal situations, since they are part of the social fiber of our society.

The prophetic tradition, as associated with the prophets



of the old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, encourages us to be active participants in this world. It is a way of bringing the Kingdom of God to God's people by challenging injustices and becoming involved in changing the social and political order. This implementation of the prophetic tradition and the Gospel of social justice is the mission of both the Church and Christian communities. In some situations, Christian communities<sup>20</sup> will replace the Church in creating social change when the Church becomes entrenched in any social-political system that supports the status quo. However, the role of the prophetic church is to bring about justice, working to overcome the plight of the poor, needy, and oppressed. It challenges the values of an industrial society that would paralyze human growth for the sake of political and economic power. The prophetic church attacks the market character of a consumer society that has replaced God with man because of advancements made in technology and science.

Man has made himself into a god because he has acquired the technical capacity for a "second creation" of the world, replacing the first creation by the God of traditional religion. We can also formulate: We have made the machine into a god and have become godlike by serving the machine. It matters little the formulation we choose; what matters is that human beings, in the state of their greatest real impotence, imagine themselves in connection with science and technique to be omnipotent.<sup>21</sup>

The prophetic church must acquire a cultural vision that is centered in a social-religious praxis.<sup>22</sup> The prophetic church in addressing the conditions of injustice in the United States

also must see them in an international context. For example, starvation in Africa could be connected to American consumption of meat products from grain fed to cattle, instead of the grain being used to feed the hungry.

The prophetic church must point out the realities of social sin in our times. Through the social actions of the prophetic church there must be a rejection of nationalism, racism, and materialism and those political-economic values that distort the true relationship between individuals. Social structures that contribute to any form of oppression directly or indirectly must be held accountable for their actions. The socio-political-economic powers, in this instance in the United States, have a moral responsibility to meet the needs of their people and, in doing so, meet the needs of people outside the country who suffer injustice perpetrated against them. The reorientation of social values away from those of materialism and the aspiring for status to those that practice the principles of Christian love and social justice creates a change in the heart of the individual.

Patterns of political and economic inequality can cease only when societal man and his institutions accept a communal responsibility for other human beings. A continuous obstacle to communal responsibility is aspiring for status which is a negative approach to the humanization of society. With aspiring for status there is no balance, but extremes in the social hierarchy of society. The principle of domination of

things and other human beings is the reality of a status-conscious society, instead of stewardship where the person realizes that he or she is in relationship with other persons and, also, nature. Instead, there should be no deception, but a sense of cooperation and mutual interdependence among people. This can be seen in the words of Albert Schweitzer when he said, "The only meaningful way of life is activity in the world; not activity in general but the activity of giving and caring for fellow creatures."<sup>23</sup>

With the communal development of society, emphasis on the materialistic consumption of things will cease to take place. Economic and political spheres of society will be subordinated to human development. The model of the new society will be determined by the needs of its people and not based on economic greed. Sane consumption is possible only when people drastically curb the right of the stockholder and management of big enterprises to determine their production solely on the bases of profit and expansion.<sup>24</sup> This decrease in materialistic goals will be characterized by a spiritual change in the social order. The spirit of service, love, and responsibility will help to promote a sense of community among the people. The development of communal responsibility is done in the light of the Gospel. Social justice must reflect biblical faith as seen in Amos 5:14-15 and speak to the present-day situation. This reflection and action will be the beginning of a new social consciousness.

The development of a new social consciousness can best be described in one word, conscientization: an awakening of critical awareness. This concept has been proposed and refined by Paulo Friere.<sup>25</sup> Conscientization is a process by which persons become aware of the cultural context in which they live and are challenged to work actively to bring about social and personal change. It is not just a form of consciousness-raising, but a new way of looking more critically at a social problem. As a tool for education, it challenges the information and educational institutions of society by involving everyone in the process of solving any social problem. Anyone involved in conscientization is not passive, but an active problem solver.

The active attitude of people taken in regard to the exploration of their thematic (life experiences) causes a deepening of their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematic, they take possession of reality....themes exist in individuals in their relations with the world, with reference to concrete facts.<sup>26</sup>

Today in the United States, social problems are taken out of the hands of the people. The solving or continuation of any problem is controlled by institutions instead of people. They (the problems) are shrouded in language and concepts that the average person cannot understand, but refuses to ask, "What do you mean?" As social problems are separated from the people, they create a feeling of frustration because of their assumed complexity, or a form of alienation because the language used to describe the problem is foreign to the people's

experiences. In this way people are viewed as objects associated with the problem and are manipulated by social institutions into believing that they do not have the capacity to solve any existing problem. The social institutions have now created a sense of social paralysis among the people; they have crippled their ability to think. The interest of an oppressor lies in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppressed them; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to the situation, the more easily they can be dominated.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, when individuals explore their own experiences they acquire the ability for "problem-posing education".<sup>28</sup> At that moment of awareness, the individual becomes the subject, instead of the object of reality. This re-education of the person's thinking creates an atmosphere where the exchange of ideas takes place with other persons. This way of dialoguing means engaging in critical thinking,

thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and people and admits of no dichotomy between them - thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved.<sup>29</sup>

Dialogue with critical thinking and awareness of reality see the world not as static, but in the process of change. It requires trust among those who participate, realizing that neither person will try to deceive the other. Through dialoguing a sense of solidarity will be born among those trying to bring about social change. This will give the people

the capacity to make choices and to transform society. It will also help people help themselves, to place themselves in a consciously critical confrontation with their problems and to make them the agents of their own recuperation.<sup>30</sup> This development of critical awareness and genuine dialogue can lead in only one direction, that is, a commitment for a more humanized society that will meet the needs of all its people.

Liberation theology opens our eyes to what is not there. To the naked eye the obvious is present, but what is missing is not visible except to the trained observer. One symbol of success, the aspiring for social and economic status, is analyzed and investigated by the trained observer. The language used to describe the aspiring for status is decoded to show that it applies to a select few. Beyond this select group, aspiring for status means competition for many through the work ethic. The myth, "if I work hard, I will succeed", is used to delude many individuals into aspiring for the unattainable: power, wealth, and social position. The established religions of society have coopted the people by perpetuating the status quo. However, that is contrary to prophetic teaching and the Gospel values that Jesus preached during his life time. These values, concern for others, social justice, love, and compassion are alien beliefs in a country that had made economic power its god.

Liberation theology challenges this false god and its

distorted symbols. It disturbs the spirit of the people by making them aware of the social and economic crisis present today in the United States. Through reflection and action a new communal vision is born. It is based on the Gospel message of social justice. It is also a process of cleansing the people of distorted social values. By liberating the people from aspiring for status, liberation theology gives them a new vision of the future; one that is full of promise, hope, and trust, so that we can share our lives and this earth with each other.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER V

1. Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice, (Washington D.C.: Center Of Concern, 1980), p. 40
2. Hans Walter Wolff, Joel and Amos, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 173
3. Lee Cormie, Diego Irrarrazaval and Robert Stark, "How Do We Do Liberation Theology?", Radical Religion 4 (1976): 25-31 See also Holland and Henriot, S.J., Social Analysis for a detailed approach to using social analysis in critiquing social problems.
4. David Tracy, Blessed Rage For Order, (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 243
5. Holland and Henriot, Social Analysis, p. 16
6. Ibid., Chapters 1 and 2
7. Joe Holland, The American Journey, (New York: IDOC/North America, 1976), p. 11
8. Ibid., p. 84
9. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 6
10. Holland and Henriot, Social Analysis, p. 32
11. Economic Analysis Working Group, Theologians Project, "The Failure Of The American Dream", Theology in the Americas Detroit II Conference, 1980. (Mimeographed).
12. Leonard Reissman, Class In American Society, (New York: Free Press, 1959), p. 65
13. "The Failure Of The American Dream", p. 17
14. Ibid., p. 22
15. Ibid., p. 24
16. Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), p. 44 See also John McKenzie, Second Isaiah, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), pp. 66-9 This section describes the idea of idolatry as in Isaiah 44:9-20. The focus is on man worshipping things



that he has created with his own hands; this is now turned into false images which he worships like a god.

17. Ibid., p. 44

18. The goal of political revolutionaries today is first to change the political and economic structures of power, and then, they assume that the human mind will also change. This is a major problem with changing of power from one group to another. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be? makes an important point about the shifting of power:

They do not see that the new elite, being motivated by the same character as the old one, will tend to recreate the conditions of the old society in new socio-political institutions the revolution has created; that the victory of the revolution will be its defeat as a revolution...(134)

19. Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings, trans. W.H. Auden and Leif Sjöberg, (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 85

20. Christian communities (comunidades de base) originated in South and Central America within the movement of the oppressed in their struggle against oppressive regimes. They are small groups of Christians who come together for study, group discussion, training, social action projects, and worship. This type of group can be found in the United States in such organizations as "The Day House", "Christians For Socialism", and "The Movement For A New Society".

21. Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?, p. 153

22. Holland and Henriot, Social Analysis, Chapter Two

23. Fromm, To Have Or To Be?, p. 163

24. Ibid., pp. 178-9

25. Denis Collins, Paulo Freire: His Life, Works and Thought, (New York: Paulist Press, 1977)

26. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (New York: Seabury, 1974), pp. 97-101

27. Ibid., p. 60

28. Ibid., p. 66

29. Ibid., p. 81

30. Paulo Freire, Education For Critical Consciousness, (New York: Seabury, 1974), p. 16

## CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION

Aspiring for status as sanctioned and sanctified by the work ethic has set people against each other. The religious sanctification of the work ethic has developed into a value system that motivates the behavior of a person towards striving for social, economic, and political status. The work ethic as organized by societal institutions turns people into competitors striving for similar goals in an arena of limited resources. It is secular in nature and does not transcend the personal interests of the individual. In this type of society, there is a refusal to recognize the dignity of the person and to accept social responsibility for the needs of the people. Love, justice, and compassion are not encouraged. To affirm human life and its communal experiences, that is, social justice and the social welfare of the people, is seen as something outside the concern of an industrial society.

During his time, Amos' challenge to eighth-century Israel went largely unheeded, but that challenge still stands today for those Christians of the United States who are aspiring for status. In their attainment of social, economic, and political status many Christians have disregarded the prophetic challenges issued to them in the bible. The selfishness of these individuals is a barrier to any openness to the demand for social justice so often repeated throughout the bible. The most blatant manifestation of evil in Israel during the

eighth-century was the oppression of the weak (Amos 2:6-8; 3:9f; 4:1; 5:11f; 6:6; 8:4-6).

In his sayings Amos repeatedly refers to this group within the social structure as the 'weak', 'poor', 'afflicted', and 'righteous' (i.e., innocent). Their suffering is a graphic manifestation of the condition of the entire nation in the eyes of Yahweh. The weak are being sold into slavery (2:6), dispossessed (2:6; 8:6), exploited (8:5; 5:11), and ignored (6:6). The prophecy of Amos can be heard as Yahweh's response to their cry, for the weak and the poor are the special objects of Yahweh's compassion and concern; the obligation of his people to protect and respect the weak in their helplessness is a theme preserved throughout the bible.<sup>1</sup>

This theme of helping the weak and the poor is a challenge that is accepted by prophetic groups of Christians and non-Christians. They believe that the illusions of success in the United States must be confronted so that all people can fulfill their potentialities as human beings. One way of challenging aspiring for status and correcting the distortions in Christian thinking is through the theology of liberation.

The theology of liberation is based on an inherent trust that within each man and woman there is a desire for wholeness, for a fuller development of his or her person. Through education there begins the development of one's mind to have a critical perspective on society and life. It is a method of self-discovery that is part inner-directed, where the individual and community discover they can become the subjects and not objects of economics, politics, and religion. Through the theology of liberation we free ourselves from the death-dealing strangulation of personal greed for status. Theology

of liberation which is life supporting frees us from aspiring for status, and we begin to realize that we are responsible for each other if we and our society are to thrive.

In an examination of aspiring for status, an analysis of the relationship between aspiring for status and the work ethic as well as their combined historical and social roots was required. Furthermore, these two areas were viewed in a biblical perspective showing how they act as obstacles to the theology of liberation in the United States. The contradictions of aspiring for status as reenforced by the work ethic are seen as a distortion of the Christian community and this is challenged by the theology of liberation whose vision of community is based on love, sharing, and social justice.

What led me to this thesis was the many years I worked at Ford Motor Company, Rouge complex, while I attended university. While working on numerous production-line jobs, I realized the significance of the stratification of positions on the production line and how the individual attempted to better his own position on the assembly line. As each worker elevated himself on the assembly line, he perceived himself as having a higher sense of status. The idea was to advance from the fixed position of an assembler to a position on the line that gave the individual a sense of flexibility and control. Although everyone associated with working on the line has a set job, some jobs seemed to give the worker

some free time; this meant less time physically working, and a chance for longer relief periods from a regimented job.

I soon noticed that for many individuals aspiring for status is a key element in their life. For the automobile worker, striving to get ahead and to be financially better off than the next person is his main concern. The reason for this is because society has conditioned many workers to be materialistic in their approach to life. This creates a situation where the worker feels a sense of security through his possessing of money and material goods. Unfortunately, with this approach to security, the worker tends to isolate himself from the needs of the community of which he is a part. This can be seen today in the defeat of local tax millages in the United States which are required to improve mental health facilities and improve the quality of education in the school system.

Aspiring for status as the main goal of an individual or as the foundational structure of society can have a negative effect both on the individual and society. The first notable effect on the individual aspiring for status is that it tends to become an all consuming goal of his life. It tends to become not just a means of improving one's life, but an end in itself. It continuously drives the person to advance his position over another person. Aspiring for status creates an overly competitive society that causes a breakdown in personal concern for the welfare of others. In this atmos-

where, the individual becomes an island unto himself. He is concerned only with his advancements in life and his own personal security. He denies that he has a social responsibility for those in society who are less fortunate than himself. He relegates his social responsibility to impersonal institutions assuming that these institutions will take care of the needs of lower-status individuals.

In addition, aspiring for status contributes to the breakdown of the communal fiber of a society. The qualities that make a community unique, such as loving, sharing, and communicating, are missing from a society that places too much emphasis on attaining status. How can people love, share, and communicate with others if they are all aggressively trying to surpass each other? Instead, the aspiring individual tends to hoard all that he has and workd secretly to promote his own position in society. The sense of trust is missing because the individual aspiring for status is fearful that another will advance higher than he on the status scale. This breakdown of the communal fiber is the worst form of alienation for the individula because it pits each individual against someone else.

All resources are now fought over instead of being used by the community as a whole. The control of resources determines for many who has the most status and, therefore, the most power. The consequence of this type of thinking is that nations must extend themselves beyond their own borders to

insure that enough resources are available for those who aspire for status. Since aspiring for status is tied into the continuous growth and prosperity of a country, in this case the United States, it becomes necessary to exploit other countries abroad to achieve a higher standard of living that is conducive to aspiring for status. This creates a situation that pits nations against each other for goods and resources that will insure the continuation of aspiring for status at home. However, this broader implication shows that not only individuals and classes but also nations aspire for status to the detriment of other nations. The struggling between nations could be seen globally as an advancement of aspiring for status. The nations, like individuals, attempt to influence or control other nations by their show of political and economic strength. The United States, as an empire,<sup>2</sup> assumes that most nations would prefer its values and social standards to those of a totalitarian system. This creates a problem where nations that accept American values, along with economic assistance, become dependent on the United States. This dependence causes these nations to lose a certain amount of global status, becoming second-rate countries in the eyes of other nations. Again, aspiring for status, this time globally, can be seen as affecting the growth and development of nations, just as it affects the growth of individuals.

An area that has been affected by this aspiration for

status is the idea of stewardship. Stewardship goes beyond the communal responsibility of man to other human beings. It is not just the possession of wealth controlled by man, but his relationship to the Earth of which he is a part.

Just as the Earth is finite, so also are its food, land, water, and air. The Earth is like a spaceship journeying in Venus with a limited supply of life-supporting resources. In the interest of our own survival and that of our offspring, we must exercise a wise stewardship over earth's resources. Events of recent years have made us increasingly aware of this fundamental obligation and of how it is ignored.<sup>3</sup>

This denial of stewardship can be traced to the distorted view of dominion as seen in Genesis 1:26-8:

God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beast and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth'.

God created man in the image of himself  
in the image of God he created him,  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth'.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of dominion is perceived by biblical literalists in a way that gives those who take the bible literally a reason for dominating and exploiting both nature and humankind.

This is seen today in man's exploitation of resources and the destruction of the Earth by pollutants released into the atmosphere and dumped into the sea. Man's disregard for limits of his natural resources is seen in the consumption of finished goods that he uses to express his sense of social



status. In the United States, this sense of dominion can be seen in the new government under President Ronald Reagan. Those in cabinet positions, like the Department of Interior, are proceeding to exploit the Earth of its limited resources. It is justified by the fact that the extraction of natural resources will make the country independent from other nations abroad, particularly in the field of energy, and that the use of resources will improve the standard of living inside the country. The people are afraid to challenge this form of exploitation because it has been cleverly tied into such ideas as prosperity, freedom, and the American way. Also, the use (exploitation) of resources is seen as a way of maintaining U.S. global status and of continuing the aspiring for individual status within the country itself.

Today, the distorted view of dominion as seen in Genesis 1:28 is being challenged by a more informed look at Genesis, particularly Genesis 2:15: "Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it."

Genesis 1:28 - God's command to man to "subdue" the earth and "have dominion" over fish and birds and all the rest - must be read in conjunction with Genesis 2:15... "Take care" is more than a colloquial conclusion to countless passing conversations; it is an ancient mandate to man the cultivator-builder. Man is not the creator, nor the Dominus. The dominion he exercises is delegated power. He is a steward, not an owner. He tends to forget this. A corrective for this tendency is found in the Book of Deuteronomy in both the 6th and 8th chapters.<sup>5</sup>

It can be seen that Yahweh placed man on Earth as a caretaker, one who lives in harmony with the planet, Earth. He is to

use the Earth's resources in a way that is not exploitative or destructive. He is in community with nature. He is held accountable, that is, responsible to God for his care of the Earth. Stewardship goes beyond just being a task because we are partners with God in the creation of the Earth. As a partner, we must love the creation, as God loves it, and this love for the creation is expressed by our love for fellow human beings. In a sense, stewardship means that we as individuals are committed to doing and seeking social justice through our stewardship. Stewardship, in relation to aspiring for status, can challenge the distortions that aspiring for status has brought upon the Christian community. The idea of stewardship, particularly as it relates to the care of the Earth, must be part of a theology of liberation. It can strengthen the social and moral responsibility of individuals as they challenge aspiring for status as it is connected with the exploitation of other human beings and the Earth.

An area that must be addressed by liberation theology, and one which I did not deal with, is the institutionalized patterns of structural violence as seen in the use of racism and sexism, as they are associated with aspiring for status. Structural violence denies dignity to the individual. It supports the privileged self-interest of a small minority of people. Structural violence attacks the spirit of service and responsibility by using institutional values that en-

courage individuals to compete against each other. Institutional violence prevails by force or consent giving it a form of legitimacy. This form of violence is part of the domination and obedience of an individual to society. It is another aspect of social injustice involving both man and the state in their attempt at subjugating another against his will. As long as aspiring for status plays a dominant role in American society, structural violence will be used by a few individuals to maintain their control over others.

In studying the idea of aspiring for status, I have neglected to deal with either sin or faith. If we are going to talk about liberation theology in a complete context we have to do one thing. We have to understand that oppression is not only evil, it is also sin. And that is going to necessitate our talking about conversion, not the other's conversion, but our own conversion, that is, the complete transformation of our interests by God's power of suffering.<sup>6</sup>

Sin is a historical reality. As Gustavo Gutierrez says,

"Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation."<sup>7</sup>

It is alienation in its worst form since it separates man, not only from another, but from God, the Creator. By rejecting another and separating one's self from the community, the individual rejects God and his social responsibility to God's creation. Through sin, the individual denies that he is part

of the creation. Instead, the individual attempts to control and exploit both nature and another by withdrawing from the creative process and thinking that he, alone, can accomplish anything he wants by himself. In The Temper Of Our Time, Eric Hoffer speaks of man being rejected from Eden for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Although his interpretation is naive and superficial, Eric Hoffer accurately describes the attitude that humans have developed when he tells the story of man's rejection from Paradise.

I. (Hoffer) can see Adam get up from the dust after he has been bounced out, shake his fist at the closed gates of Eden and the watching angels, and mutter: "I will return." Though condemned to wrestle with a cursed earth for his bread and fight off thistles and thorns, man resolved in the depths of his soul to become indeed a creator - to create a man-made world that would straddle and tame God's creation. Thus all through the millennia of man's existence the vying with God has been a leading motif of his striving and efforts.

In challenging God, the individual has tried to become like god. His creating of things and continuous aspiring for status gives him a sense of power; power over nature and other human beings. Unfortunately, in this state of sin, the individual cannot be in brotherhood and feel a sense of real love for another person. He is outside the community and on his own. Because of this, he depends more on the institutions that he created for a sense of self-worth. The only way that the individual can redeem himself in the eyes of God is through rejecting the idea that he alone can accomplish his goals and accepting his social responsibility to share his life in com-

munity with others.

This conversion takes place when the individual realizes he can do justice to the relation to God that has been given to him only by actualizing God in this world.<sup>9</sup> This entails a faith that requires an openness in how we see ourselves and the world through the eyes of others.... "where faith is at issue, the payoff is whether or not it leads to our being 'poured into life'...<sup>10</sup> Liberation theology shows the individual that there is an ongoing relationship between faith and doing. Faith helps us to get involved and this involvement helps define who we are in relationship to our commitments to our own faith and to that of the community.

This thesis is one way at doing liberation theology.

The thesis is the reflections of my life experiences as they have brought me to this point in my life. It relies on insights from the social sciences, particularly those of sociology and psychology. It examines the historical and social roots of aspiring for status as reenforced by the work ethic. It is done in the light of the prophetic challenges of the prophets, in this case Amos, and with an understanding of the social gospel as preached by Jesus during His time and applied to the present-day situation. The thesis is an attempt at looking at an aspect of society through the theology of liberation and adding a new dimension that may have been overlooked by the theology of liberation in the past. With the continuous analysis of social problems, one hopes that in the future, our

? present-day society will be transformed into a communal society where love and sharing will replace the negative effects of aspiring for status that is sanctified by the work ethic in our present society.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER VI

1. James Luther Mays, Amos, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 10
2. William Appleman Williams, Empire As A Way Of Life, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) This is a fine book in explaining how the United States operates as a world empire.
3. William J. Bryon, S.J., Toward Stewardship, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 13
4. The Jerusalem Bible, (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1966), p. 16
5. Bryon, Toward Stewardship, p. 56
6. Is Liberation Theology For North America?, (New York: Theology In The Americas, 1978), p. 145 See also, Jurgen Moltmann, "The Motherly Father," in God As Father?, ed. Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), pp. 53-4 and Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets, Volume II, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), Chapter I. Both Moltmann and Heschel discuss the idea of God's power of suffering.
7. Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology Of Liberation, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 175
8. Eric Hoffer, The Temper Of Our Time, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 33-4
9. Robert McAfee Brown, Is Faith Obsolete?, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 118
10. Ibid., p. 137

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