Liberal Society as Liberation Theology

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I will accept the definitions of liberation theology that any liberation theologian offers. It is fair to hear people out in their own terms and to accept their labels and symbols on their terms. Insofar, though, as liberation theologians have a "preferential option for the poor," and seek to reduce "repression" and "human rights abuses," there is a fairly clear and stable standard that, in its own terms, liberation theology must meet: Does it liberate? Actually. In practice. Does it actually lift up the poor so that they are no longer poor? Does it actually institute new structures of human rights, so that citizens are not tortured and their other rights are not violated?

In this respect, the books of liberation theologians are disappointing. They say that they are interested in praxis. But one learns very little from them about the practical institutions they will put in place the day after the revolution that they seek. Institutionally, how will they protect human rights? Institutionally, how will they achieve the economic growth that raises up the poor? One will learn far more about preparing for the praxis of actual liberation from reading The Federalist than from any volume of liberation theology written thus far.

That is why I now turn to the liberation theology native to North America, and the second term in our debate, "the liberal society." The first persons to be called, and to call themselves, "liberals" were so named because they sought three liberations. The infant United States was the first crucible in which their experiment was tried. They sought liberation from tyranny and torture in the political sphere; liberation from the tyranny of poverty in the economic sphere; and liberty of conscience, information and ideas in the religious, cultural,
Quite naturally, the tri-couleur was the symbol of the first liberal nations: one color for each liberation. True, some of the first liberals (especially on the Continent) were harshly anti-religious. The anti-clerical, anti-religious ferocity of French liberalism was one of the forces that drove the newly founded Pères de Saint Croix to emigrate from France to found the University of Notre Dame. Thus, Liberalisme achieved a bad name in the Catholic tradition. Often, too, its true import has not been grasped. Among early liberals, my favorites are those, perhaps better called Whigs, who grasped the importance of tradition, religion, liturgy, community and history in the liberal project: not only Lord Acton, but also, to some extent, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke, and above all Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville opposed the socialists of France on one side, the traditionalists on the other. He once said that the heart of the Christian faith is liberal. And he understood the originality of the American experiment.

A hundred years ago, when the people of France wished to offer a proper symbol for the United States, they contributed the Statue of Liberty. This Statue has ever been the proper symbol of the liberal society, and of North American liberal society. “Send me your tired, your poor,” that Statue says, as if to underline the preferential option of this system for the poor. And most of our families did come here poor. Think back to your own families, circa 1935, or earlier. Were they from a privileged class? Or were they poor? Generation after generation, the poor have streamed to America and been lifted out of poverty. This “liberation theology” actually does liberate. (Of course, I have always been glad my grandmother could not read English and therefore could not read those other, more ambiguous words of welcome on the Statue of Liberty: “The wretched refuse.”) My family was not aristocratic. Nor were your parents, or those of most other Catholics in the United States.

In fact, as Gertrude Himmelfarb makes clear in her magisterial study, The Idea of Poverty, one of the great motivating drives of the first liberals, as distinct from the Malthusians, was their recognition that poverty is a form of tyranny, and that poverty as tyranny can and should be broken. Because these first liberals, particularly Adam Smith, had discovered the causes of wealth, they knew that poverty could be broken, in a systematic and sustained way. Because it could be, it must be; a new moral obligation thereby entered human history.
Concerning poverty, resignation is not enough. Humans must act to diminish it. Underdevelopment is not good enough. There is a moral obligation to achieve development, along all its human axes. The motto of the state of New York expresses this: “Excelsior!”

In 1800, the first liberals contemplated a world of some 800 million living souls, most living under tyranny, in poverty, and in ignorance (not only in illiteracy, but in ignorance of basic hygiene and fundamental medicine). The average age of death was about nineteen. In France, perhaps the most developed nation, the average age of the oppressed sex at death was twenty-seven, the average age of death of the oppressor sex, twenty-three. The condition of man in his natural state offered by Thomas Hobbes was taken to be reasonably descriptive of human life: “Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

As Pope John Paul II recently said, there are 800 million hungry persons on this planet today. That is a sad, but true, fact. The liberal task has yet to be completed. But what the Pope did not say is that, 185 years after 1800, there are four billion people who are not hungry, that many more are living (because of giant strides of creativity in medicine, pharmaceuticals, immunizations, and the like), and are now living to an average age of nearly sixty.

In 1948, Karl Marx described the bourgeois revolution as the greatest transformation ever experienced by the human race. At that time, he had not seen the half of it.

So I am not talking about an abstract ideal, but about a real flesh-and-blood system that has dramatically altered human history. In particular, I want to talk about the United States as it is, as one embodiment of the liberal society. If the United States is not democratic, which nation is? If the United States is not capitalist, which nation is? If the United States is not pluralistic and free in conscience, what place on earth is? Yet this actual, real system in which we live is based upon an idea, a conception of order, painstakingly worked out by our Founders. (Read the Constitutional debates, The Federalist, and the private papers and correspondence of these practical visionaries.) They knew our system was unlike that of France, Great Britain, Italy, Morocco, or any other. They described it with full seriousness as Novus ordo seclorum: new, an ordo, an order rooted in a new conception, and “of the ages,” a new turning point in all of human history.

The Founders were the offspring of a biblical people.

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For more than a thousand years, devout readers of the Bible had reflected on its images of the person, the community, the nature and destiny of human beings, the common good, and an order worthy of what God had taught them about human dignity. They had learned of the inalienable dignity of every single person, of the need to promote the general welfare, of the necessity for republican virtue, and of the need to build a new republic worthy at last of human dignity. Jefferson, indeed, thought of the United States as "the second Israel."\(^2\)

Parenthetically, it is here that the second draft of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' "Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy" still errs, precisely in its section on the Bible. The second draft summarizes what contemporary biblical scholars find of interest in the Bible. But the current interests of the biblical scholars of this generation, whose wisdom will wither as the grass of the field, is not decisive. To accumulate biblical texts, written for a pre-democratic, pre-capitalist, pre-growth period of history, and then to leap from that context to today is pure fundamentalism. Of far more decisive importance is the impact of the Bible through the centuries, upon devout and practical persons who reflected upon it, in trying by many and often bloody experiments to design institutions worthy of the human dignity affirmed in the Bible. One must see the Bible as it actually worked in the history of political economy, as yeast works in dough. One must study how it affected Catholic social thought from Augustine to Aquinas to Lord Acton and, above all, how it affected the social vision of the new American republic, in its political, economic and moral systems. The Bible was decisive for the invention of the system we enjoy in the United States, mired in sin as every human system is, the system whose proper and most telling name is democratic capitalism.

Many Catholics miss the full impact of that concept. They think of "capitalism" alone, an "unfettered market," an "invisible hand," solely a "free enterprise" system, "libertarianism." This was never the American idea. (It was certainly not the idea of Adam Smith, who canonized the quite different term "political economy," or of John Stuart Mill, who wrote The Principles of Political Economy.) In political economy, both the political system and the moral-cultural system possess crucial power.

For example, a cultural system rooted in Judaism and

2. See infra note 7 and accompanying text.
Christianity will insist upon concern for the poor. Through the political system, its citizens will seek to promote the general welfare, to design a system of universal education, and to continue to experiment with a system of care for the poor. Such steps do not contradict a successful capitalist economy; on the contrary, they are indispensable to it. Similarly, a free market economy requires regulation and cannot function without it. Welfare for those too old, too young, the disabled, and the unfortunate is an altogether proper task for political economy, especially among peoples of Jewish, Christian, and humanist roots. In both the world of theory and the real world of practice, political economy is three systems in one: a political system, an economic, and a moral-cultural system—all three mutually interdependent.

The most apt descriptive name for this system runs parallel to the phrase “political economy.” Democratic in its political system, its economic system is properly designated capitalism. Further, this name, “democratic capitalism,” implies respect for liberty of conscience, information, and ideas: in short, pluralism in its moral and cultural institutions. Such a tripartite system represents the three full “liberations” that are the inheritance of the liberal society.

This concept of social order is opposed to both the illiberalism of the Right and the illiberalism of the Left. It is opposed to both traditionalism (e.g., of Latin American and other Third World types) and to socialism (whether of the Soviet or of the Socialist International). In a large sense, social democratic and democratic socialist societies (such as Sweden) are variants of the democratic capitalist idea. They tilt toward the left or statist side. They lean to the “political” in “political economy,” that is, to the state. They allow some autonomy to the economic system and to the moral-cultural system. They are not fully socialist. The full-blown democratic capitalist idea, by contrast, requires a dynamic and fluid balance among the three independent-interdependent systems. It insists, therefore, upon due autonomy for the economic system and the moral-cultural system vis-à-vis the state.

Three biblical ideas, among others, lie behind the democratic capitalist reality. Without such ideas the latter could not have come into existence. As Jacques Maritain saw, the modern conception of democracy springs from centuries of meditation upon the biblical notion of humankind. And as Max Weber saw, capitalism cannot be defined solely in terms of ancient and traditional social techniques such as private property, markets, profits, and incentives, since all these ex-
isted even in biblical times in such ancient cities as Jerusalem. In Weber's eyes, capitalism brought something new into history, first seen near the end of the eighteenth century. Its originality lay less in technique than in the domain of the human spirit. (Thence his title: *The Protestant Catholic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*) This new thing, for which he reserves the name of "capitalism," consists of a new morality and a new set of moral obligations. The three biblical ideas mentioned above led, during centuries of trial and error, to its invention. One can discern this originality in the differences of *ordo*, or system, in Latin America and North America.

In 1776, Adam Smith had already predicted that Latin America would eventually end in poverty and tyranny (exactly as the liberation theologians of today describe). Why? Because the Latin American experiment consisted in reconstructing an ancient order, that of the Holy Roman Empire: a mercantilist view of wealth as gold and silver, an economy based chiefly upon a landed aristocracy, and the unity of church and state. By contrast, Smith recognized that "the colonies" of North America were attempting a new experiment, based upon an original conception of social order, a *novus ordo*.

What made the *ordo* of the United States different from any in Europe or elsewhere? What was new about it? Three of its novelties were biblical in inspiration.

(1) The Jewish-Christian notion of sin lay behind the fundamental division of systems, the division of powers in the political system, and a pervasive systemic concern with checks and balances. The Jewish-Christian conception of man is empirically based. It holds that every human being sometimes sins. Therefore, no person, class, or group may be entrusted with total power. Every human, even a saint or a philosopher-king, given total power, sooner or later will be tempted to torture others (for the common good). Therefore, one cannot trust political leaders with power over conscience, ideas, or information. The institutions of religion, intellectual life, and the press must be given powers separate from those of the political system. This idea had been pioneered in the free cities and free republics of Europe since the Edicts of Toleration.

More original was the principle that political leaders should not be trusted with power over economic institutions. To an unprecedented degree, economic institutions in the United States were separated from the state. The result, as Oscar Handlin has pointed out, was that in 1800, in a nation of roughly four million persons, there were more private cor-
porations in the United States than in all of Europe. The reality of human sinfulness, therefore, led to the invention of an unprecedented division of social systems, the separation of the American social system into three relatively equal, but quite different systems: political, economic, and moral-cultural. From this conception of order arises both a check upon human sinfulness, and a liberation of historical dynamism.

Madison maintained that, in designing a new order, the founders must build neither for angels nor for brutes, but for humans as we are. Any plausibly successful order must represent a political economy designed for sinners, the only moral majority there is. In The Federalist No. 51, Madison wrote:

But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on government; but experience has taught men the necessity of auxiliary precautions.

The motto on our coins expresses the Founders' concept quite well: "In God We Trust"—that is, "nobody else."

(2) The Jewish-Christian concept, beginning in Genesis, that humans are made in the image of God the Creator, taught the early Americans that the vocation of Christians, Jews, and humanists is not merely to be passive, resigned, and reconciled to history but, on the contrary, to change history and to be creative, to pioneer, and to persevere in being inventors of a new order. The short answer to Adam Smith's Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations is: The cause of wealth is creativity. Not natural resources. Not labor. Not planning. Rather, human wit, intelligence, inquiry, invention—in a word, the old caput ("head"), from which the name for the system, "capitalism," is appropriately derived. Until Adam Smith, wealth (identified with gold, silver, and the like) was thought to be limited,

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4. The Federalist No. 51 (J. Madison).
a zero-sum. It could not be created, only taken. "If the rich get richer, the poor get poorer." This traditional relation was erroneously thought to be causal. The classic villain was the miser, or hoarder, whose wealth (necessarily) was subtracted from the common store.

After Adam Smith, a new morality came into play. If wealth can be created, then, seeing the tyranny and misery inflicted by poverty, Smith discerned a new moral obligation: the moral obligation of development, the moral imperative to raise every poor person in the world out of poverty. If new wealth can be created, the miser who hoards his gold is less a villain than a fool, and thus the miser disappeared from the ranks of literary villains.

Three brief examples may clarify the power of this insight. First, a contrast between Brazil and Japan. Brazil is larger than the continental United States (excluding Alaska), and is perhaps among the top three nations in the world in natural resources. With an almost identical population (in 1980, about 118 million), Japan is roughly about the size of Montana. It has almost no natural resources. Yet Japan produces seven percent of gross world product, Brazil under two percent. If natural resources were the cause of wealth, Brazil would be rich, Japan poor. In three ways, Japanese society is ordered to creativity: in the design of its system; in the organization of the Japanese personality by mind; and in inventiveness.

Second, a reflection on "natural resources." If we had sought through the centuries for metaphor for poverty, we would have said: "Poor as a Bedouin." The poor fellows did not even have water or shade. Yet what do we say of them today? "Oil-rich Arab nations." What made the difference? The invention of the piston engine, and the discovery of how to refine gasoline from crude oil. Invention turned oil from useless, noisome stuff to "black gold." So it is with almost everything designated as a "resource." The stuff of nature becomes a "resource" only when creative intellect discovers a use for it. There are no known limits to the wealth the Creator has hidden in nature, waiting for humans to detect its clues.

Third, as Adam Smith drew many of his central insights from "the colonies," arguing that Great Britain should learn from them, so also the Americans learned much from his Inquiry. One such lesson led to the Homestead Act, opening up the American middle west to what Abraham Lincoln called "free labor—the just and generous, and prosperous system,
which opens the way for all—gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all." The principle is that there is more intelligence in millions of individual citizens than in any small band of central planners or government officials, however brilliant. Whereas the American "slave states" were built upon the Latin American idea of the large plantations of a landed aristocracy, the North American idea was free labor and an independent citizenry. Congress further insisted upon land grant colleges in every new territory, on another Smithian principle: viz., that the cause of development is intellect.

(3) The distinctive Jewish-Christian idea of community—not based on birth or kin or territory or religious unity, but on free and voluntary covenant—led to the American discovery of a new principle of the new science of politics: the principle of voluntary association. There are three aspects to the new democratic-capitalist conception of community.

First, Adam Smith called his book The Wealth of Nations not The Wealth of Individuals. His was the first vision of universal, worldwide development. His is preeminently a social vision. The vision of democratic capitalism will not be attained until a sound material base is placed under every single person on this planet.

Second, the chief institutional invention of democratic capitalist societies is not the individual (already magnified by the aristocracy) but the corporation and the association. These social forms provide a new way for human beings to organize themselves for voluntary social action, including economic action, in independence from the state.

In addition, and quite paradoxically, the market system obliges individuals to be other-regarding, not necessarily from charity, but even from enlightened self-interest. No matter how good you think the product or the service you offer, you will get nowhere in a market system unless you actually meet the needs of others.

Thirdly, democratic capitalist societies develop a new type of personality in their young, aptly called the communitarian personality. We do not raise our children to be "rugged individualists." On the contrary, we raise them to be open to others, gregarious, active in many groups, skilled in association. By the time she was seven, my youngest daughter

5. A. Lincoln, Address before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Milwaukee, Wis. (September 30, 1859), reprinted in 3 THE COLLECTED WORKS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN 471, 479 (R. Basler ed. 1953).
already belonged to more organizations, attended more different meetings, and took part in more activities than both my wife and I could drive her to. Democratic capitalist youngsters have a larger range of social skills than those developed in any socialist society. Even our most beloved sports—our public liturgies—are team sports.

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In short, the liberal society, benefiting from centuries of reflection upon biblical themes such as sin, creativity, and a new conception of community (universal, associative, and communitarian), has set a benchmark for other social orders. The liberal society, to repeat, is based upon three liberations: liberation of conscience, ideas and information (the institutions of pluralism); liberation from tyranny and torture (democratic institutions); and liberation from poverty (capitalist institutions, in concert with moral-cultural and political institutions).

Liberation theology claims to have a “preferential option for the poor.” But, the day after the revolution, what sort of economic institutions does liberation theology plan to set in place, that will actually help the poor no longer to be poor? What sort of institutions will it set up to block tyranny and prevent torture? What sort of institutions will it set up to guarantee liberty of conscience, ideas, and information? If liberation theology succeeds in helping to construct such institutions as these, then it will meet the tests of the liberal society, and achieve genuine human liberation. Then we are all “liberation theologians;” and if not, not.
Several misunderstandings of the nature of democratic capitalism are so frequently encountered that I append a short "catechism" to clarify certain themes.

1. Capitalism in the United States is morally bankrupt. It has been saved from itself by political and moral energies emanating from elsewhere.

The American system, from the beginning, relied upon all three fundamental social systems: (1) the institutions of the moral-cultural system (churches, press, universities, families, and associations of all sorts); (2) the institutions of the political system (executive, legislative, judicial; parties, citizen organizations and movements; regulatory agencies of government, patent laws, and the system of private property; and the welfare functions of localities, states, and federal government); and (3) economic institutions (including habits of enterprise and invention; corporations large and small; partnerships; unions; associations of employees, stockholders, consumers, professionals, industries, and commerce).

Significant moral impulses, principles, habits, and important institutional protections are found in each of the three systems. No one of the three systems aims to cover the whole of life.

In particular, our government has always provided many goods that the economic system alone does not, not only in protecting the legal bases of a commercial republic, and not only in the necessary regulation of commercial life, but also in its legitimate educational and welfare functions.

The legitimate functions of political and moral-cultural institutions are not contrary to a capitalist system, but are its necessary adjuncts, supports, and counter-balance. The Homestead Act, the land-grant colleges, the patent and copyright laws, rural electrification, the many Highway Acts, Social Security and the Progressive Income Tax are a few among many such legitimate functions.

2. In America, laissez-faire capitalism has been modified by socialist ideas, leading to the "mixed economy" of the "welfare state." Much that is good in the system is not due to capitalism, but to socialism.

The expression "mixed economy" suggests that two incompatible ideals have been "blended." This does not accurately depict either the original idea of the American experiment or its historical unfolding. From the beginning, the
Founders recognized the rights inhering in citizens as moral-cultural agents, as political agents and as economic agents. Their basic conception was "political economy." The economy and the polity were joined together from the start. Ours is not, then, an artificially "mixed economy." The original conception of "political economy" implies a legitimate role for each of three fundamental systems. The concept of "political economy" explains how the expansion of the "welfare state" since the 1930's could be justified as coherent with America's original premises, including, "to promote the general welfare."

3. Social democratic or democratic socialist regimes such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Israel, West Germany, and Great Britain are morally superior to the U.S. model, economically at least as dynamic, and politically more democratic.

The political economies of such regimes are (in my opinion) most accurately classified as variants of the democratic capitalist ideal, somewhat more heavily tilted than the United States toward state controls. Their own socialist parties criticize them for being insufficiently socialist. The socialist bloc classifies them as "capitalist." Such regimes do, in fact, respect the principles of private property, markets, incentives, invention, and growth.

Many of us prefer the U.S. model because it is more inventive and dynamic, and less burdened by statist regulation and controls. This difference leads some to think of the Western European nations as closer than the United States to the "socialist" ideal. But the West Germans, for example, strenuously insist that their "social market economy" is not socialist. Some analysts (myself included) think the greater role of the state in Western European nations is a defect, and that the burden of social spending they have inflicted upon themselves in the name of security is diminishing their economic and cultural vitalities. Since 1970, while the United States has created some 29 million new jobs (as of October, 1985), such Western European regimes have been losing jobs. In Sweden, many analysts rightly speak of the "crisis" of the welfare state, already committed to absorbing fifty percent of GNP in taxes, and by the year 2000 more than sixty percent.

4. Capitalism has not worked in Latin America.

Latin American economies are not capitalist but pre-capitalist. They are heavily burdened by traditionalist state bureaucracies, which dominate the economy. To have markets, private property, and a private sphere is traditional, not in
itself capitalist. Capitalist economies go beyond traditionalist economies in setting limits upon state activities in the economic sphere; in their attention to education, invention, and creativity; in the scope they allow to enterprise and private economic associations; in the public virtues they nourish; and in the balance they try to strike between the political system and the economic system. In addition, capitalist economies operate by a different “spirit” (Max Weber’s shrewd word) than do traditionalist economies, by different virtues and habits, and by a different range of economic institutions. These institutions include patents and copyrights, research and development, easy access to legal incorporation, incentives for growth, the availability of easy credit for the poor and underprivileged in order that they may launch enterprises of their own, reliance upon a large and constantly growing small business sector, and bankruptcy laws. Latin America has not yet passed from a pre-capitalist, traditionalist system to a capitalist system.

5. Capitalism offers no hope in the Third World.

On the contrary, those Third World countries that follow the capitalist model soon join the ranks of “developed” nations; e.g., the capitalist nations of East Asia. Even in socialist countries, the movement is towards proven capitalist economic methods, as in the cases of Fabian India, Marxist China, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and even the U.S.S.R. itself. Socialism was not invented as a system designed to produce economic development. Its main historical purpose has been political control. The socialist ideal of economic organization is being modified rapidly by a thousand capitalist qualifications, because of repeated historical failures in the one case and success stories in the other.

Wealth in a truly capitalist nation wells up from the bottom, especially in the small business and small farm sector, and in the entrepreneurial genius of many who were born poor.

6. Capitalist economies are morally decadent, emphasize “having” rather than “being,” and engender an epidemic of “loneliness” and “alienation.”

These are empirical assertions. They must be demonstrated. Are moral and religious vitalities in the United States weaker, empirically, than in other nations? Capitalist economies allow an immense range of free choices in the moral and religious sphere, such as how young persons choose a way of life. The moral and religious vitalities of the people of the
United States—and also the artistic vitalities, scientific and research vitalities, and vitalities of invention (as represented, for example, in Nobel prizes)—do not seem weaker than those visible in traditionalist, in Soviet-style, or in social democratic systems.

Both freedom and the right to pursue happiness (alone or in association with others) are inherently terrifying. In free societies, one can only blame oneself for one's choices in life. A free life is not the life of a hive, herd, or flock. Each person is on the spot (as in baseball, each individual, though in association with teammates, comes to the plate one at a time). The terrors of liberty (which I have elsewhere called "the experience of nothingness") are not a sign of alienation, but of authenticity.

As for loneliness, most Americans have a deserved reputation for gregariousness and openness, are up to their ears in associations of many kinds, and live as full a voluntary social life as any citizens on earth. Even our bumper-stickers say "smile," and both a communal impulse and public-spiritedness are immensely powerful. I don't know about you, but I am often dying to have a little more solitude, a little more "loneliness."

About a third of our working population works in the not-for-profit system. Becoming a saint, a mystic, a poet, a folksinger, a drop-out—emphasizing "being" rather than "doing" or "having"—are options pursued by many Americans. Most, indeed, choose work in which they are happy, in preference to work in which they might be paid more and "have" more. In any case, there is ample room to choose to live as one wishes, and even to be supported by others in doing so.

7. What is a neo-conservative?

A neo-conservative is a person brought up as a person of the left, who grew dissatisfied with the ideas and the spirit of the left. Typically, this dissatisfaction arose because the way of life of the left seemed to demand so many forms of false consciousness and, above all, a loathing for the American system. Most of us can recall in family memory our own real and urgent poverty. Yet America did liberate us from poverty, while other nations, to which members of our original lands of birth also migrated (such as Brazil, Argentina, etc.), did not liberate their immigrants. This difference is crucial to our self-identity. In this respect and others, the analyses of the left regularly involve the denial of one's own experience.
The left also punishes anyone who begins to deviate and to dissent. Dissenters are excommuni­cated, verbally abused, driven out. That is why more and more young people, constantly exposed to leftist criticism, are becoming disillusioned with the left: in that sense, becoming neo-conservative.

The idea that will own the future is democratic capitalism. It works. Besides, not much is left of the left. A poster announcing a socialist meeting in New York City two years ago said it all: "What's left?"

8. But capitalism helps the rich, not the poor.

We were all—at one time—poor. Capitalism helped us, and billions of others. Capitalism did little for duchesses, who already had silk stockings, but much for the poor and working classes, who within two or three generations of capitalism also had silk stockings—and tea, coffee, pepper, spices, and many other goods once solely the prerogative of the rich.

In the aristocratic literary tradition, and in the Marxist tradition, it is always asserted that capitalism is "exploitative." But was that, even in 1830 or 1897 or 1931, a fair picture of events? If so, why did our families migrate in such great numbers precisely toward the centers of capitalist activity? They well knew the exploitation of traditionalist societies. They found capitalist forms comparatively liberating.

Even the 28 million blacks in the United States, arguably the worst-off of the U.S. population, have a cumulative income ($188 billion) larger than the gross domestic product of all but nine other countries of the world, and more than half as large as that of all the 551 million people of Africa.

This is not to say that the three liberations to which democratic capitalist societies are committed (political, economic, and moral) have been accomplished. There is much yet to do. But one must compare the realities of the liberal society to the actual historical alternatives. Secondly, one must compare the ideals of the liberal society to other active ideals.

In my judgment, the liberal society is superior in the realm of practice. And its ideals are morally more attractive. Those ideals are the ideals of the future, both because they work, and because they are most consonant with human na-

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6. The estimate for the income of Black Americans for 1985 has been computed by Brimmer and Company, Wash., D.C. The World Bank's WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1985 lists the gross domestic product for all nations as of 1983. The cumulative gross domestic product of Africa in 1983 was $349 billion.
ture itself. Thomas Jefferson succinctly stated the ideal of the liberal society: “The God who gave us life gave us liberty.” And the Catholic intellect who towers over the nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville, observed quite correctly that the heart of Christianity discerns in human liberty the dignity of the child of God. Few have stated more clearly the “Proposition” on which the United States is built than John Courtney Murray, S.J., when he wrote:

The American Bill of Rights is not a piece of eighteenth-century rationalist theory, it is far more the product of Christian history. Behind it one can see, not the philosophy of the Enlightenment but the older philosophy that had been the matrix of common law. The “man” whose rights are guaranteed in the face of law and government is, whether he knows it or not, the Christian man, who had learned to know his own personal dignity in the school of Christian faith.

Ironically, the liberal society, some of whose first historical protagonists were anti-religious, owes its originating insights about the dignity of the human person and the nature of community to Jewish and Christian inspirations, and does not make ultimate sense apart from biblical perceptions.

Not accidentally, perhaps, most of the prominent neo-conservatives are Catholic and Jewish, loyal to traditions older than modernity.

7. Robert N. Bellah summarizes the context:
That the Mosaic analogy was present in the minds of leaders at the very moment of the birth of the republic is indicated in the designs proposed by Franklin and Jefferson for a seal of the United States of America. Together with Adams, they formed a committee of three delegated by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, to draw up the new device. “Franklin proposed as the device Moses lifting up his wand and dividing the Red Sea while Pharaoh was overwhelmed by its waters, with the motto ‘Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.’ Jefferson proposed the children of Israel in the wilderness ‘led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.’”
