

sidering the work of such communitarian thinkers as Charles Taylor and Iris Marion Young. In particular their understanding of the communal nature of the self could have contributed much to his thesis. Perhaps most troubling is his tendency to identify certain ethical standards present within society and to assert both their value and their legitimacy without a careful consideration of those values.

As an example of this last point Clor repeatedly notes that monogamy is a basic fundamental value held by a society that justifies legislation for public morals in the areas of marriage, prostitution, pornography, education, drug legislation, and gambling (among others). In describing monogamy as an ethical standard he presents a very romantic description of the values it entails (with the added proviso that it provides economic and social benefits for the rearing of children) without addressing the problematic nature of its application in practice. While these values may be legitimate ideals, his failure to address criticisms, such as those leveled by many feminists that the ideal of the family currently expressed by society is oppressive and indeed often dangerous for women (through the pervasive presence of marital abuse), weakens his argument that the presence of this shared "morality" is in fact a public good.

Notwithstanding these criticisms this book is worthy of attention and serious consideration.

David Sinacore-Guinn

McGill University

***A Future for Socialism? Political Theology and the "Triumph of Capitalism."* By Harold Wells. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996. ISBN 1-56338-239-X. Pp. xvii+220.**

Harold Wells, professor of theology at Emmanuel College in Toronto, has written a book about the achievements of socialism, the congruence between socialist ideals and Christian faith, and the ravages wrought by neo-liberal social policies. Wells begins by asking what kind of political orientation is in keeping with Christian faith. He argues that Jesus' proclamation of the coming reign of God, and his death and resurrection, provide a horizon of hope that both "encourages" and "beckons" people to seek the approximation of God's reign in history (45). While one cannot hope to build the kingdom of God, still faith in Jesus Christ provides hope that people can meaningfully work towards "particular, concrete penultimates" (48), overcoming specific evils and alleviating certain sufferings. Wells then discusses the reputed triumph of capitalism, asking what has led to the discrediting of socialist ideals and policies, and offering a theological analysis of the social impact of capitalism. He offers an overview of the various forms of socialism, their limitations and achievements, and concludes that the destructive tendencies of capitalism, the past achievements of socialism, and the congruence between Christian faith and socialist goals all suggest that Christian socialism is a political/theological tradition that should be continued and renewed.

While Wells grounds his argument theologically in the Lordship of Jesus

Christ (15–20), he grounds it contextually by analyzing the development of various forms of socialism and capitalism in recent history. He sees the essence of socialism to be “the determination to distribute and democratize economic power, to limit the political power and social-economic control exercised by private capital,...and to use democratic power for the economic well-being of the people” (138). He notes that while capitalist societies have excelled in unleashing the economically creative and productive power of peoples, they also tend to turn commodities and the pursuit of wealth into idols to which the greater human good is sacrificed. Socialism developed in protest against the destruction wrought by this. He argues that it is wrong to identify socialism with the recently collapsed state-owned and controlled economy of the Soviet Union. As he shows, socialism has taken many forms and has made genuine achievements when judged according to broad criteria of the quality of life.

This leads to the important conclusion that the finality of the so-called new world order in which capitalism reigns supreme is an illusion. The continued failure of capitalism to create a just and equitable community means a continued opening for socialist policies and visions. If these are formulated and presented so that people can see their human interest better fulfilled therein, they may well opt for them. What has failed is not socialism *per se*, but the past forms of socialism in the face of the globalization of trade and the changes wrought by new technology. As Wells shows, socialism is now tending to develop from the bottom up at the grass-roots level. The current crisis of socialism is a crisis of institutional forms, not of socialist ideals. The human needs that first gave rise to socialism and the Christian hope for a more abundant life on earth remain, waiting to find expression in an appropriate vision and political strategy.

Wells admirably makes this case in a very readable fashion, but he does not delve very deeply into the social currents and cultural developments that led to the current discrediting of socialism. Readers seeking a deeper analysis of this might look to Eric Hobsbawm’s *Age of Extremes* (1994). Nor does he enter into debate with Weber’s famous thesis, that the impetus for the development of modern Western capitalism came from a form of Reformed Protestantism. It would have been interesting to see Wells engage these scholars’ explorations of the cultural and social roots of capitalism and socialism.

While the book is written primarily for Christians, socialists in the Canadian context who are seeking to renew their tradition might find this book interesting, for the Social Gospel was an important factor in the development of Canadian socialism. Wells seeks to renew on a firmer theological basis the theological tradition of the Social Gospel, which flourished earlier in this era, helping move Canadian society towards greater social justice. Particularly interesting in this regard is Wells’s argument that Christian faith and socialism are not just congruent in outlook, but actually in a sense require each other. To function well a truly socialist society requires sanctified individuals (190). This is a point that socialists sometimes overlook. One could add that the process of sanctification also leads to, and in some sense requires, a society structured according to socialist ideals.