

## Chapter 8

### *RELATIONSHIPS OF PRODUCERS AND PRAXIS OF THE PEOPLE*

#### 8.1 STATE OF THE QUESTION

There are those who hold that morality and ethics are essentially ideological. Thus morality and ethics would depend basically on laws, virtues, or superstructural demands (if the last-named category has any meaning). This is a false position. Morality and ethics consist basically in praxis-in real relationships among persons. Morality and ethics are both corporeal, carnal, fleshly. They are *infra*-structural elements (understanding by this term anything of an economic or productive nature, anything connected with life and corporality).

Every day the media carry news stories about workers, corporations, popular movements, and indigenous organizations.

We read in holy scripture:

Are not the rich exploiting you? They are the ones who hale you into the courts and who blaspheme the noble name that has made you God's own. You are acting rightly, however, if you fulfill the law of the kingdom. Scripture has it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show favoritism, you commit sin. ...If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, "Good-bye and good luck! Keep warm and well fed," but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? [James 2:6-16].

Our entire reflection here must remain on the level of corporeal,

material, bodily radicality, which is consonant with the greatest holiness, if by holiness we understand ethical perfection.

## 8.2 "SOCIAL" RELATIONSHIPS OF DOMINATION

When a shoemaker exchanges shoes for bread, a *relationship* between persons arises—a relationship between the shoemaker and the baker. The exchange constitutes a praxis (see 1.2). The production of the shoe or the bread is a *poiesis* (see 1.2, 11.2, 18.2).

These relationships need not be social relationships of domination. They may be communal (8.3). I call relationships between producers *social* relationships of domination when two persons engaged in the process of production are not in a state of equality, justice, and goodness. One of the producers dominates the other. This relationship, maintained in the process of production, is one of inequality, sin, domination (2.2, 3.2). Morality, in the sense of a system of concrete practices (3.6), is situated not only on the level of law (7.2ff.)—the plane of norms or requirements, virtues—but also on that of these real infrastructural, intercorporeal "practical" *social* relationships obtaining among producers themselves.

Even Marxist moralists frequently relegate morality to the ideological plane. Thus they reduce morals and morality to verbal formulations, to obligations of rights and law, to the imperatives of duty—all on an abstract, mental level of mere intention. I should like to register my explicit disapproval of this volatilization of the moral (and by implication, of the ethical). Social moral relationships are actual, infrastructural, practical relationships among producers, within actual, historical modes of production. It is here that the drama of morality (and ethics) is played out.

Because domination, sin, is the relationship that institutionally establishes a definite relationship between persons (2.5), morality is founded totally on praxis, and its norms or exigencies are but superstructural formulations of those antecedent, practical, social, moral relationships.

## 8.3 COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

In the same way, when the shoemaker and the baker are living in *community*—whether in the utopian community of Jerusalem (1.1), or in our ecclesial base communities, which represent varying

degrees of participation in that ancient ideal-and exchange their shoes and bread, they establish an ethical, *community* relationship.

I call relationships among producers-among the participants in a production process-*communal* in virtue of a practical relationship of two or more persons constituting, in justice and equality, without domination, an "association of free persons" (1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9; James 2:12-13). The product of their work in community will belong to all of them-the practice that, according to the unanimous opinion of the Fathers of the Church, must have prevailed among human beings before original sin (2.6).

Ethics is not primarily or essentially a set of norms, obligations, and prophetic maxims-not even in the case of the Sermon on the Mount. Ethics requires, as antecedent condition of its possibility, the concrete, *real* life of the *community*, such as the one Jesus was in the process of founding with his Apostles. It was the praxis of that community that generated the norm, "Happy the poor!" In that community, *factually* and *really*, in actual community relationships, the poor were happy, satisfied, treated as persons. And from out of this concrete experience, ethical norms and requirements were derived.

Community relationships of justice, real ethical relationships (infrastructural relationships, in their status as relationships among producers-bodily relationships) are the essence and foundation of ethics, the real starting point of the ethico-prophetic critique. The critique as such may emerge on an ideological level. But it originates on an infrastructural, practical level: that of *community* relationships themselves.

#### 8.4 WHAT IS "CLASS"?

Let us examine that specific instance of *social* relationships of domination (8.2) known as social class. As we know, the question of the "class struggle" (see chap. 16) is a hotly debated one in our time.

Before actually discussing the topic of social class, it will be in order to explain what is meant by it. Had it not been for "original" sin (2.5, 2.6)-if men and women had lived in community ( 1.5, 1.6)-there would have been no such thing as social class. Social class is the result of sin (16.3-4), in the sense that the dominated class, the poor (2.7), die in life (2.8). (And if there were no *dominated* class, there

would be no classes at all, for the constitutive difference of the latter is domination, or a relationship of inequality among stable or institutional groups of persons.) Inequalities-as Rousseau ought to have indicated-are the fruit of sin. It is owing to sin that there are unequal classes.

A "class" is a stable group of persons who, within the practico-productive totality of society, perform a structural function-determined by the *productive process* (*Laborem Exercens*, 11-13)-in the division of labor, in the appropriation of the fruit of toil (11.6). Thus it is the *social* relationships of domination (2.2, 3.2) that determine the dominant and dominated classes. (There are also intermediate classes, auxiliary classes, and so on.) The Aztecs were divided into the dominant warrior classes and the peasants who paid tribute. It was the same with the Incas. Likewise in medieval European society: the feudal lords demanded tribute of the serfs. Today the owners of capital pay their workers a wage, in an unequal exchange of product and money (12.5).

The classes, then, are social relationships of domination inherent in the whole praxis-production process, inevitable in any tributary system-capitalistic, socialistic, or whatever. Each type of social relationship determines distinct social classes in each system.

## 8.5 WHAT IS MEANT BY "PEOPLE"?

A class is not a people. "People" is a category that will have to be determined with clarity and precision if we hope to be able to distinguish it from other concepts. The "popular question" has not been settled.

"People" is a more concrete, synthetic category than that of the more abstract, analytic "class." The term "people" is ambiguous. A whole nation may be called a "people"-for example, if it is engaged in a struggle with foreigners. This is the populist sense of the word "people": the dominant classes are part of the "people." Or the word "people" may denote only the *oppressed* of a nation, and the oppressing classes will not be part of the "people." I shall be using the word in this latter sense.

Thus a "people" is the "communal bloc" of a nation's oppressed. A people consists of the dominated classes ( the working or industrial class, the campesino class, and so on). But it is also constituted of any

human group that is either non-capitalistic or that performs class practices only sporadically (marginal groups, ethnic groups, tribal groups, and so on). This entire "bloc"-in Gramsci's sense-constitutes the people: a people is the historical "subject" or agent of the social formation of a given country or nation. The "Cuban people," the "Nicaraguan people," the "Brazilian people," and so forth, are composed of the persons who permeate the respective history of the various practico-productive totalities. Thus we have the pre-Hispanic Amerindians, the colonials, the neo-colonials, and even the members of post-capitalistic societies. Each of these groups is a people.

A people-in the sense of the oppressed classes of a nation-introjects and interiorizes, it is true, the ideology and culture of its dominators. Hence the necessity of evangelization (carried out by prophets-9.3, 19.7) and political organization (effectuated by heroes-9.3, 17.2). The peoples, as the masses, are the dominated; as exteriority, they constitute the eschatological reserve; as revolutionary, they are the builders of history.

## 8.6 PRAXIS OF THE PEOPLE AS OPPRESSED

As oppressed, dominated, a people suffers the fruit of sin: its members are hungry, without clothing, without housing; they are in pain, they are tortured, they die. As oppressed, they are *"part" of the system*. They are a social class, an exploited "bloc." The wage-earning "class" is precisely the human group whose current domination constitutes the system as such. In the feudal system the serf was obliged to pay a tribute. Insofar as it is brought into being by the social relationship of domination (2.2, 2.5)-precisely as one of the terms of that relationship (1.2, 2.2, 2.5)-a class is *part* of the system.

A people qua oppressed is a nation's social bloc. It includes all such persons as, with their labor, with their life, permit the "rich" (in the biblical sense, as a theological category-sinners, those who rob the "poor") to live. In this sense the people is an alienated, negated "crowd," a mere multitude, sacrificed to the idol (2.3).

The praxis of a people *as oppressed* is an imitative praxis, one that reproduces the system of domination, one that enables the hegemony of dominators to survive, one that consents to the structure that

immolates it. As oppressed, popular praxis is negative, alienated, imitative, a praxis of consumerism. As undifferentiated crowd, as passive mass, the people must be politically organized by heroes, and prophetically evangelized in order to be transformed into the collective subject of the reign of God, the agent of a new political order.

The theology of liberation is "second act," or act of reflection upon the praxis of the people, the oppressed classes-the "poor," then, but "poor" in the politico-economic sense, the destitute, the penniless, who must beg in order to live, not poor because oppressed, alienated, "massified." That praxis cannot, it is true, constitute the actual focus of liberation, but it can furnish its starting point.

### 8.7 PRAXIS OF THE PEOPLE AS EXTERIORITY

This mass, this people, not only forms a bloc of oppressed, a *social* bloc; it engages in communal practices, external to the system (and regarded by the system as trivial, non-existent, unproductive, useless). Precisely as *exteriority*, the people constitutes the "*community* bloc" of the oppressed.

I have already observed the meaning and importance of being "in the exteriority" (4.2,5.2,5.6) of the system. Beyond the *totality* of the system that makes the dominated a class, rendering them marginal, or simply ignoring them ("the natives"), the people has an experience of *exteriority*. The "unproductive" aspects of this "bloc," of the people, the aspects that do not generate wealth in the form of profit for capital (12.1), are nevertheless part of the life of the people.

Here I refer to popular culture (18.10). That culture has its language, its songs, its customs, its friendship (a friendship of solidarity), its daily communicativeness and "sociability." The people knows how to establish *community* relationships (1.9). Who belong to the people? The poor who believe in the poor, who help the poor, who love their disgraced brother or sister. All such aspects of the people, aspects exterior to the system of domination, constitute the *positivity* of the people, and the *affirmation* that constitutes the wellspring of liberation (10.6).

Furthermore, there exists a whole *underground* production and economy, likewise exterior to the system. "Underground" is the term used-in the underdeveloped countries peripheral to capitalism-

for denoting the manner in which a people regulates itself in order to survive in a system of exploitation. The value of the underground is that it makes it possible for the people *still* to be there when the moment of liberation struggles arrives. In the underground, eking out their miserable survival, the people learns the cunning of a prolonged war for political, economic, popular, national emancipation.

## 8.8 A COMMUNO-UTOPIAN PRAXIS AMONG THE PEOPLE

Thus an entire people, as the bloc of a nation's oppressed, is predisposed to a comradeship of solidarity with any member in pain. The "base Christian community" will redouble this natural community quality of that people, by infusing it with "Spirit."

By "comuno-utopian praxis" I mean the actions and relationships of the base Christian communities, "living the reign of God" in a very special manner (1.9, 4.4, 4.6, 4.9, 5.6). These actions and relationships are "utopian" in the sense that they are situated "without": they are *outside* the system. (Thus they are "placeless": Gk., *ou*, "no, not"; *topos*, "place.") The life of the base Christian community responds not to prevailing morality, but to the ethics of the gospel. A people as such, as a historical people, is ambivalent. It contains the best: its exteriority vis-à-vis the system. But it also contains the worst: its alienating introjection of that system.

In a context of this ambivalence, and deep within the ambivalent people itself, the base Christian community asserts the exteriority of the people vis-à-vis the system, its experience of itself as other-than-the-system (in its quality as a *communal* bloc of the oppressed). The base Christian community thus becomes a place, a space, among the people in which that people, once their consciousness has been raised, will become *authentically* a people, as not-being-(dominating)-system. And in this sense the historical people (the crowd) becomes "my people" (the people of Yahweh), the "people of God" in the sense used by the Second Vatican Council.

True, it remains for authentically popular parties, fronts, or political groupings to organize the people for historical, political tasks. But the "eschatological community" (the base, utopian community), the "church of the poor," retains its purpose, its *raison d'être*: as the subject of a dialectic, the political (5.10,9.4-9.10) can

always close in upon itself and become a moral system of domination. A new idolatry is always possible: thus a prophetic, critical vigilance becomes a necessity.

#### 8.9 A PROPHETICO-COMMUNITY PRACTICE OF LIBERATION AMONG THE PEOPLE

A Cuban Christian militant recently confided to me:

After twenty-five years of enthusiastic collaboration with the revolution, we Christians have finally understood that we have something to give the revolution that it does not and cannot have in any other way: the *absolute* meaning of life, of service, of love.

The "absolute" is the divine, that which corresponds to God, to eternity, to the holiness of something that will rise, never to die again. It is upon this utopian hope that *the ethical* rests, for it is upon this utopian hope that the Christian faith itself is founded. Here is a hope that no historical revolution can adequately assert.

In the concrete, Christian prophecy emerges from the community praxis of the "church of the poor," the base Christian communities. They furnish the locus or focal point of the people as people. They provide the "whence" of the ethico-prophetic critique of the prevailing morality of domination. The base Christian communities are not exterior to the people, however. They do not impose, they do not pretend to constitute a vanguard. The elitism of those who "know," of the self-appointed conscience or *savoir-faire* of the people, those who would steer the people, lead the people, is something the base Christian communities must avoid. On the contrary, the base communities must form an "organic" community at the heart of a people. They are part of the people, one popular organ among many, one organizational aspect of the people itself.

Nevertheless the Christian experience does add something to the popular process, to the life of the people. It furnishes eschatological hope. It furnishes the faith that the people is composed of the daughters and sons of God and that God's reign will come. It provides effective love in the form of charity, the option for the other as other. It sets in motion, deep within a people, a current



inaugurated by the Spirit (4.2ff.)--a spontaneous groundswell, emerging from nowhere, created without antecedents. This is the transcendent collaboration of the Christian community.

Like John the Baptist, the community prepares the way. And when heroes are moved by their charisms to create something new (and there are surely charisms of the Holy Spirit outside the church as well), the base Christian communities, the "church of the poor," the prophets, are ready and waiting, prepared to contribute their active collaboration.

#### 8.10 LIBERATION PRAXIS OF THE PEOPLE

The theology of liberation presupposes a type of praxis without which it could not exist. Theology is reflection. *Primary theology*, then-basic, or "first" theology (20.9, 20.10)--will consist in the present type of tractate; it explains and describes, engages in theological reflection upon, takes as its starting point, the praxis of liberation undertaken by the people.

The popular praxis of liberation emerges when the people "gets going," when it "gets on its feet," when it begins the process of countering the structures of sin (2.5 -2.6), when it initiates the struggle against the Satanic work of domination, injustice, sin (2.10). The liberation struggle is the battle with sin, with domination, with injustice and economic thievery, with political authoritarianism, with ideological alienation, with traditional machismo, and so on. When the people launches this struggle, then its praxis, its actions and relationships, are *liberated* from the old institutional bonds. The struggle can consist in revolution (16.7), or its preparation, or its consequences.

There are stable situations in history--situations of permanence and durability (9.6-9.7, 16.6). The present situation in Latin America is not one of these. On the contrary, everywhere around us we see an old process in its death agony and a new historical order being born. Hence the growth of a popular *liberation praxis* against the dependent capitalism suffered by our peoples. We struggle against an exploitation felt in *our* "skin" alone (and not in Poland, Rome, or the United States).

It is the liberation praxis of the communal bloc of the oppressed of the Latin American nations, today, at the close of the twentieth

century, that provides the starting point, the "whence," the origin of what is called the theology of liberation (see chap. 20). This theology is the discovery not of individuals, but of an entire generation, a "school of prophets." But first and foremost it has the people as its source, its wellspring, its origin. Liberation theology is popular theology.

## CONCLUSIONS

I have not attacked conservative, moralistic positions in this chapter. On the contrary, I have criticized certain leftist elements that disparage ethics, first because they are unable to distinguish it from prevailing morality, and secondly because they situate both ethics and morality in the ideological, juridical, political "superstructure" (an extremely ambiguous category, to which I refer only in order to reject it). The social or economic relationships of production *include*, in their basic foundation, a practical aspect—a moral or ethical aspect, then. The relationship of one individual's domination over another is itself a practical relationship: it *is* domination, and hence sin. Sin pervades and infects, from the base up, the "material" aspect of production. Thus it is that prophetic criticism of a historically constituted mode of production functions as the antecedent, the "that which determines," where the future mode of production is concerned. And thus Christian communal hope, faith, and love can *determine* the infrastructure of future systems (and Marx himself, in his celebrated introduction to the *Grundrisse*, leaves this possibility open).

## Chapter 9

### *POLITICAL HEROISM, ECCLESIAL MARTYRDOM*

#### 9.1 STATE OF THE QUESTION

Many of the problems presented by a communitarian theological ethics can be resolved by bearing in mind the difference between state and church. State and church are two distinct institutions, functioning in the one and only salvation history. But the builders of the new *state* are frequently expected to work with the same mediations employed in the construction of the new *church community*.

It is not always understood that a *theology of the state* is as necessary as an ecclesiology .

Every day the newspapers carry stories of the heroic deeds of men and women engaged in the valiant struggle for liberation in Central America, Africa (Namibia, for instance ), or Asia. Our Christian newspapers and periodicals show us the prophets, the heroes, and the martyrs. What is the relationship between the hero and the prophet?

We read in holy scripture:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I dedicated you,  
a prophet to the nations I appointed you.  
"Ah, Lord God!" I said,  
"I know not how to speak; I am too young." ...  
Say not, "I am too young." ...  
But do you gird your loins;  
stand up and tell them

all that I command you.  
 Be not crushed on their account,  
 as though I would leave you crushed before them;  
 For it is I this day  
 who have made you a fortified city,  
 A pillar of iron, a wall of brass,  
 against the whole land:  
 Against Judah's kings and princes,  
 against its priests and people.  
 They will fight against you, but not prevail over you,  
 for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord [Jer. 1:5-19].

The hero and the prophet are very similar, in their call as well as in their activity, and they are frequently confused. Earlier I referred to Camilo Torres as a hero, and I call Oscar Romero a prophet and martyr. Why? Because the hero and the prophet have different functions.

## 9.2 SOME NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS

It would be easy to infer that the distinctions I am about to make bespeak a new dualism. But no, I hold to the unicity of history. There is only one locus of salvation history, one universe to house the history of liberation. Nevertheless, we must clearly distinguish between two institutions that emerge in the process of the building of the reign of God.

Let me begin by observing that the hero and the prophet are distinct individuals. By *hero* I understand a politically-minded person who turns his or her life toward the construction of a new homeland, a new historico-political order. George Washington was a hero, as were Miguel Hidalgo and Che Guevara (the last two were murdered before they could see the triumph of the revolution to which they had dedicated their lives). By *prophet* I mean that believing Christian who undertakes a total bestowal of his or her life, in a spirit of consecration, to the evangelization of the poor, to the building of religious, utopian, Christian communities of believers. Heroism and prophecy are both *charisms*, but they are distinct charisms.

Heroism founds the state (in the broad sense of the word-not

only the bourgeois state, then, but the pharaonic, the Roman, the Hispanic, and so on). Prophecy founds the church (as a community of believers-see 1.1, 1.5). The person (even the Christian) *as a political person* and member of the state, and the person or Christian *as a Christian*, as a member of the eschatological community, are not formally identical. State and church institutionalize their praxis in different ways, and in different relationships and organizations.

The *heroic death* of the political person must therefore not be confused with the *martyrial death* of the prophet. They may occur together, as when Zealots were crucified with Jesus. Indeed, both persons are put to death for the same reasons. But their praxis, their tactics, their strategies, are distinct. Likewise distinct are the institutionalization they inaugurate and the social or communal entities they organize.

### 9.3 HERO AND PROPHET IN PERSECUTION AND LIBERATION

Let us examine, in chronological order, four theological, biblical (but at the same time theoretical and abstract), structural stages in the metamorphosis of what Saint Augustine called the City of Abel or City of God into the City of Cain or Babylon (see 3.5, 4.10, 5.5, 5.10).

A heroic death (9.2) is as much the fruit of sin as it is of martyrdom. Both are the product of the praxis of domination (3.10, 4.10), as in the case of the repression, torture, and persecution inflicted on hero and prophet alike by the "*national security state*" of today's Latin America. Egypt and Babylon oppress the Hebrews, Jerusalem murders Jesus, Christendom burns heretics and dissidents, imperialism represses, tortures, murders, and lends money to buy weapons. In all instances, the praxis of domination is domination over the poor, without discrimination between hero and prophet. This is the first stage in the transmutation of the City of God into the City of Satan.

Unless (or until) they are murdered, like Miguel Hidalgo and Carlos Fonseca, or Father Carlos Múgica and Archbishop Romero, the hero and the prophet busy themselves with the organization of the liberation process. The hero organizes the oppressed to the end that they may throw themselves into a process that includes struggle.

Here we have Moses and the plagues of Egypt, Gandhi, or Lenin in the days before the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution (and thus prescinding from any evaluation of the current socio-political or economic content of that revolution). The hero leads the organizations, armed or unarmed, of which a people has need if it is to defend itself and bring Babylon down to dust. The virtues of heroic courage and political prudence join forces to defeat a stronger, better-armed enemy.

The prophet-always hand in hand with the martyr-organizes a church ready for the day of liberation: small communities, with their theologies of liberation, living a life of actual poverty and organized on the model of the "church of the poor."

#### 9.4 THE HERO ALSO BUILDS THE WALL

"Let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem" (Neh. 2: 17). The function of the city wall is defense in wartime. Just as the city is not the temple, neither is the city wall the walls of the temple. In Latin America today we have the example of the Nicaraguans, who must defend their borders against their enemies to the north (5.10). In Europe the Czechs lost their "Prague Spring" through being unable to defend themselves.

A certain anarchism-whether that of the left, which would accomplish the full realization of the utopia of the reign of God here and now, or that of the right, the anarchism of the bourgeois, laissez-faire liberal (like today's neo-conservative), which proposes a perfect market with perfect competition, so as to be able to do without the state-will always oppose the organization of political society. In 1918 the Soviets undertook to develop the Soviet Union on anarchist lines. The effort failed, and in 1921 the New Economic Policy was inaugurated. A certain realism had replaced the anarchistic ideal (17.2-17.3).

In order to build walls, bake bread, and beat swords into pruning hooks or plowshares, one must have certain *technologies* available: the "architectonic" technologies, from planning to metallurgy. The hero must turn politician and technologist. Valor in the field yields to technology, planning, and prudence in the political arena. The reign of God needs walls, bread, and plows. Without that which satisfies-the object produced-there is no satisfaction. Not even holy

scripture can exist without paper or papyrus, an alphabet, ink, and so on. Concrete technologies, constituting the material, Corporeal infrastructure of the possibility of the incarnation of the Word, are now the order of the day. A *theology of the state* is then necessary—a theology of the divine demands (as conditions *sine qua non* of the satisfaction of the hunger of the starving, the clothing of the naked, and so on) a theology of the historical apparatus that produces sacramental objects. Before you can have the eucharist you have to have the *substance of bread* (6.7).

### 9.5 THE PROPHET ALSO BUILDS THE TEMPLE

Like heroes, prophets shift their activity from life-imperiling combat with the frenzied apocalyptic Beast (the old, repressive state), to the humble construction of daily community. "They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread" (Acts 2:46).

The prophet will be tempted to pine for days gone by, when everything seemed so clear. Repressors had been so easy to detect. But in the lights and shadows of a shift to democracy (as in Brazil in 1985), or in the moment of a revolutionary triumph, when all suddenly profess the victorious ideology Gust as all were Marxists in the Soviet Union in 1918, or Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1980), the deck has been reshuffled, and the latest arrivals are "more Catholic than the pope"—more Leninist than Lenin himself. "Old guard" heroes and prophets risk being overwhelmed by the new champions of "the right way to go about it."

Babylon has fallen. The prophets Who excoriated it must now roll up their sleeves and head for the fields to cut sugar and pick coffee. Now their work is to consist in the positively productive daily effort to produce wealth, bread, for the poor, for the people. There is a time to die (a time of repression), and a time to work (in the rebuilding of the temple), and we recall Ezekiel's dream when the people of God still languished under the repression of the Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 40ff.)—a dream that now can become reality (Ezra 5:1ff).

Many Who had kept their counsel in Egypt, in Babylon, or under Somoza, suddenly recall, once the revolution has triumphed, that the prophet's role is to "criticize." And lo, the dumb speak. Now we have criticism in abundance, and from every direction. But there is

criticism, and then again there is criticism. It is the Dragon and the Beast who are to be criticized. The New Jerusalem is not a legitimate object of criticism. In the New Jerusalem, the first priority is to *work*, to *produce* bread, for the table, for the eucharist. The day of the "work ethic" has dawned, and Fidel Castro, none other, when asked what he means by "practitioners of the revolutionary ethic," points to the nuns of the leprosariums.

This is the second stage in the metamorphosis of the City of God into the City of Humankind.

#### 9.6 THE POLITICIAN: MANAGER OF THE POWER OF THE STATE

Let us proceed with our present abstract, schematic indication of the four stages in the metamorphosis of the City of God (Augustine's *Civitas Dei*) into the City of Babylon (*Civitas Babyloniae*). We have already seen the first two. (1) In the repressive state, the task at hand is the *destruction* of the prevailing system; the hero and martyr will answer the call (see 9.3). (2) In the new state, *construction* is the order of the day. The promised land, conquered by a Joshua, is to be rebuilt by an Ezra or a Nehemiah (see 9.4, 9.5). (3) The third stage will characterize the state in its classic equilibrium (9.6,9.7). But then (4) the state reverts to the repression of the Beast (9.8,9.9).

In the third stage, then, a balance of forces has been struck. The state would appear to have established a classic kind of order, based on hegemony and consensus. There is order indeed, in harmony and unity. Here is the "perfect society." All mortal enemies have disappeared from its midst. The poor are fewer now, and lack any consciousness of their poverty, having imbibed the ideology of newly dominant groups.

Civil society has become "pluralistic" -conveniently enough, for the pluralism in question straddles but a single band of the political spectrum. Here is Hegel's "organic state," lolling in the lap of peace and harmony: its position as economic metropolis of so many peripheral colonies enables it to appease the hunger of its own dominated with wealth extorted from the poor beyond its frontiers. And behold the *Pax Americana* of the post-World War II era. The prevailing order seems so "natural"! More than this: a new "civil religion" springs up-the " American way of life."



Thus the third stage is one of temporary equilibrium. The ethical spirit of the heroes continues to animate the mere morality of the system. A "social teaching" flourishes (see 19.6), demanding certain acceptable "reforms" in the established order. This is where Karl Popper sees a radical reform as the absolute evil: utopia.

### 9.7 THE ECCLESIASTIC: ADMINISTRATOR OF "RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS"

This time of seeming peace, when prophecy has fallen still, is the calm, stable moment of the priest, the ecclesiastic, the ritual celebrant of the established order. David the king is David the prophet-much more of a poet than a prophet, of course, as one can scarcely prophesy against oneself.

It is at this point that the church begins to regard itself as the "other perfect society," on a par in this respect with the state. Now it insists on its "autonomy" vis-à-vis the state-the latter being fundamentally acceptable now (along with the economic or ideological regime), although it may be called upon to adopt partial "reforms." Capital is found to be in contradiction neither with nature nor with morality. Of course, profit must never be excessive. Land has a rentable value, likewise in virtue of its nature. Of course, the rent must not be unjust. Work may be adequately remunerated by wages-which, again, must be just. Once more the prevailing order has become identified with human "nature." Structural sin (2.5), one would swear to it, exists no more, and the domination and death produced by the sinners smolders in oblivion.

For the church, the state is neither a Babylon to be brought low nor a Jerusalem to be rebuilt (being, after all, so well built). Our third stage is that of the status quo, of the "way things are." The church, in the hands of sacerdotal ministries, celebrates the system, acclaiming rulers, praying for them, crowning kings and emperors, walking shoulder to shoulder with the generals in their parades, and so on. The church is the Church Triumphant, the Church of Christ the King-not the church of Christ the poor one, the one crucified by the state-of Catholic Action that must strive to gain the upper hand in the political contest for influence over the state, over the "powers that be," over the current prevailing order.

In the slow metamorphosis of the City of God into Babylon, then, the clerical conceptualization of the church has come into its own. The prevailing models of church and state are mutually consistent, mutually implicit.

#### 9.8 WHEN THE STATE REPRESSES THE NEW POOR

One of the essential dialectical moments of Jesus' theology of history consists in the principle enunciated in Deuteronomy 15:11: "Never will there cease to be poor upon the earth; wherefore I command thee: Open your hand to your brother the poor one, the needy of the land." There are those who think that capitalism, or socialism, can eradicate poverty *forever and absolutely*. They will doubtless regard this Jesus principle, taken from the Old Testament, as the tenet of a radical pessimism. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is but realism in the hope of the reign of God!

The authentic theologian can never become the ideologue of a party, however authentically revolutionary the party. The theologian will always maintain an eschatological, prophetic reserve, which will announce its presence through a critique stemming from the *new* poor. Any revolutionary process, however just, will inevitably and necessarily produce new poor. Hence the possibility, the suitability, the necessity of the critique in question.

Where there is freedom there may be domination. In fact, there always is. Then sin appears: someone suffers the effects of the domination. And behold, *new* death and *new* poor—new in the sense of different. In the Middle Ages, the poor were those deprived of the protection of the fief: the pariahs of the cities. In capitalism, the poor are those without money (see 12.1ff). In socialism, the poor may be those who have no control over planning, or those without any responsible awareness of the terms of the productive process, or the like (see 17.8), as *perestroika* recognizes. At all events, the state founded by George Washington is now the state governed by Ronald Reagan and by a Congress that votes funds for the overthrow of Latin American governments. Something must surely have happened over the course of the intervening two centuries! The hero has been transformed into the Caesar: Jesus "suffered *under*

Pontius Pilate," we profess in the Apostles' Creed. Pilate was a military official who governed in the name of the reigning Caesar.

### 9.9 THE CHRISTENDOM MODEL: FUNDAMENTALISM

As we see, we have reached the fourth and final stage of the metamorphosis. We began our ascent with Moses and the prophets, writhing under the power of the Beast in the form of a pharaonic, Babylonian, or imperialistic state. Now, our ascent, our long metamorphosis, is over-and we emerge in the world of Moses' successors. Lo, they have been transformed into the monarchy that represses the poor in Israel or Judah. The exiles of Babylon have returned to Jerusalem, only to crucify the Christ. Suddenly the exiles are the temple, they are Annas and Caiaphas. They are a religion of domination. "Behold ye all this? I solemnly assure you: all of it will be razed to the ground, and not a stone will be left upon a stone" (Matt. 24:2).

An anachronistic, a-dialectical, a-historical *Weltanschauung*-the World view of conservative, antitraditional, dominative thought-attempts to eternalize a stage in a metamorphosis and falls into sin and abomination (Luke 19:46). *Only prophets are traditional*. They alone discover "the new" to be the willed-by-God. Christendom sprang up by way of an identification of Christianity, the church, with the Roman state (from the time of Constantine or Theodosius), or with the Frankish kingdom (beginning with Charlemagne, A.D. 800). Religion became the bastion of the state, and the pope crowned worldly monarchs "by God's will."

Given this claim that it is Jesus himself who crowns the kings and the dominators, who are those who have to die under the iron fist of the state? How does one distinguish El Salvador's "Christian Democrats" from Christian Oscar Romero? Who holds the place of Jesus now? In Christendom you can murder prophets in the name of Jesus, as occurred in Chile under Pinochet. You can even torture them to death in that name, ;as occurred in Brazil under Commissar Fleury.

As the heroic state founded by George Washington was gradually transformed into empire, so the brave chaplain of the American Revolution can become the prelate who blesses the weapons to be used against the "communists" of Vietnam.

## 9.10 THE NEED FOR AN ONGOING DIALECTIC BETWEEN STATE AND CHURCH

Christianity invented the secular state. Before the advent of Christianity, there was no such thing. All states were divine, and of necessity. But with Christendom things would no longer be the same. For the first time in history, the need would arise for a secular state. Christianity found itself unable to do without such a state as its vis-à-vis. The church needed not-to-be-the-state. Accordingly, there must be a state that would not be the church. And the secular state was born.

The eschatological function of the church-essentially a function of the "church of the poor" (Pope John XXIII) in its quality as prophetic, ethical, and free vis-à-vis prevailing moralities-is to start the whole of history down the road to the Parousia, the end of history as the return of Christ. All totalization, fetishization, and petrification of a system (and all repression of the heroes and the prophets, whose purpose is to prevent history from continuing its course and direct it toward *new*, more just systems) stunts the growth, delays the arrival, of the reign of God.

The eschatological function of the church is a critical praxis, and one that will not stop short of destroying institutions that embody sin and render it historical (2.5, 2.6). If the church were the state, if ethics were morality, whence would come a critique of the prevailing domination? In order to abide in "exteriority from the state," the church (at least in the base Christian communities, where it keeps company with the poor-the church as the "church of the poor") must not be the state. There has been ambiguity in Christendom between church and state, but never total identity, thanks precisely to the *institutionality* of the church, which has prevented the absorption of the latter by the former.

Heroes and martyrs, politicians and prophets, state and church, are distinct realities, then-both of them necessary for the reign of God, although both are capable of rejecting it.

## CONCLUSIONS

Faced with the phenomenon of the metamorphosis of the City of God, we are tempted to exclaim: What good is our activity if the whole process ends up at square one? What point is there in a

liberation praxis that will eventually become a praxis of domination? The answer is simple. Nothing in the process is ever the same as before. None of it ever simply repeats itself. All of it is new and unrepeatable: new domination, new poor, new agents, new sinners. Where am I, then, where are we: among the dominators or among the poor? Where will I be casting my lot here and now: with dominators or with liberators? If my comrades in the struggle today are the dominators of tomorrow, that is their affair. You and I shall simply have to mount the struggle against them. The reign of God is *never finished* in history. Ever and again, it *begins* building, here and now, in the praxis of liberation, for us or against us. The important thing is which side we are on, and who the enemy is. Are we with Jesus against the Prince of "this world"? The Parousia, Jesus' return ("Come, Lord Jesus!"-Rev. 22:20) is hastened, indeed realized, in the very praxis of liberation.

## Chapter 10

### *RELATIVE MORALITY, ABSOLUTE ETHICS*

#### 10.1 STATE OF THE QUESTION

Catholic theology is particularly concerned to avoid any relativism in moral questions. This attitude is valid where genuinely absolute norms are at stake. But it has also led to the absolutization of relative values, and the "social teaching of the church" (see chap.19) is a case in point. What is good today can be evil tomorrow-not because the principle of good and evil is relative, but because circumstances can change. (And the first *circumstance* is the *cycle* of the prevailing system as an all-encircling totality.)

The daily newspapers are filled with news of the actions and projects of persons, especially politicians, calculated to fall in perfectly with the intentions and principles of a particular social group. An example would be the United States' Strategic Defense Initiative, or "Star Wars." It is imperative that we learn to distinguish the absolute from the relative in all of these daily events.

We read in holy scripture:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has consecrated me;  
He has sent me to bring good news to the lowly,  
to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberation to captives  
and release to prisoners,  
To announce a year of favor from the Lord  
and a day of vindication by our God,  
to comfort all who mourn [Isa. 61:1-2].

Let us undertake a theological reflection on the *absolute*, universal character of *ethics*. What is it about an authentic ethics that endows it with validity for all ages and circumstances? We must learn to appreciate the relativity of the *relative*, lest we stake the future of Christianity on something destined to pass away with the chrysalis of our times.

## 10.2 SOME NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS

It is a peculiarity of relativistic thinking to wish to have the relative pass for absolute, and then to reject it because it is only relative. Conservatism likewise maintains the absolute value of the relative (which it controls)-but this time the intent is to be able to assert its everlasting validity. With the relativists we shall reject the conservative absolutes. But against the relativists, we shall register our discovery of an absolute of which they know nothing, owing to their a-dialectical, a-historical, and totalized approach to reality.

In the first place, any "morality" (see 3.2,3.6,3. 7)-"morality" as the prevailing system-is *relative* to the system itself (as specific entity). Aztec "morality" -what was considered right or wrong in Aztec society-cannot be judged according to the criteria of Roman or Hindu "morality." Torn from its context, the praxis of the Aztec warrior will make no "moral" sense whatever to the Greek or the Hindu-and vice versa. "Moralities" are meaning-totalities (as Hegel explains in his elucidation of the concept of *Sittlichkeit*, or "customs" of a people). Thus, *any morality* is relative to itself, and not susceptible to a comparison with anything extraneous.

In the second place, the "ethical" (see 3.2, 5.3, 5.7, 5.9) carries a demand that will be valid in any system and at any time: "*Never* will there cease to be poor on the land; therefore I command you: Open your hand to your brother" (Deut. 15:11). *Never in history will the poor cease to be-* that is, *there will always be poor*. Inasmuch, then, as we are dealing with a reality that knows no bounds, we easily recognize that the corresponding imperative, demand, *ethical norm*, will likewise be boundless: "Open your hand to your brother." Now we see why "Liberate the poor!" "Feed the hungry!" "Help the needy!" represent *absolute* ethical exigencies-imperatives valid for and in all relative moral systems.

In a word, authentically ethical imperatives *transcend* merely "moral" requirements. They may flow in the same direction as the latter, or merely be compatible with them, or be positively incompatible with them. "Moral" imperatives are empirical, historical, relative, and systematic. Ethical imperatives are transcendental, absolute, and nevertheless concrete (not abstract) (see 5.9).

### 10.3 RELATIVE MORALITIES

Any culture-in the sense of a civilization, such as the Assyrian or Egyptian, Greek or Hindu, feudal European or Aztec, Bantu or Zulu-contains within itself a *morality*, in the form of a concrete "practical system" or system of practices (see 3.6).

A practical system, or the totality of the practices of a people ( or group, or class, and so on), consists in a global structure of interpersonal *relationships* (1.2), held to be normal, natural, legitimate, and good, and obtaining in the family, the economy, politics, religion, and so on. These practical relationships, in turn, are defined by norms, exigencies, imperatives, or moral laws binding the members of the group to their observance.

The system of practices, norms, and relationships in question is stable, is transmitted from generation to generation by upbringing and education, and has its organs of coercion (police, penal institutions, and so on), which have the authority to impose penalties for infractions of the norms of the system. Its moral authorities (from shamans or priests to courts of justice) enjoy the respect of the consensus of civil society. It is impossible for a people simply to discontinue its moral order, codified since antiquity and held to be its by all of the normal members of that people.

Observe: the "practical totality" in question here is *relative*. First, it is relative to itself. That is, it is valid to the extent that it is held to be valid by all: it depends on consent and consensus. It is a tautology. Secondly, it is relative in the sense that it is valid for one group but not for another. It is peculiar to all persons born in such and such precise circumstances, and this differentiates it from any other historical moral order. Thus the opportunities for a transition from one moral practical system to another are few and far between, although from time to time certain aspects of any moral system will



"pass on," by actually changing their meaning (as Roman law "passed" into medieval European or modern capitalistic law).

#### 10.4 THE TRANSCENDENTAL IMPERATIVE OF THE GOSPEL ETHIC

"Ethics" (3.2) cannot be understood apart from a reference to "morality." Morality is the "flesh" (6.3,6.4), the "whence" of the entire ethical operation. In dissociation from an established order, though it be an order of domination, prophetic criticism cannot exist. In the reign of God, where there will be no evil, there will be no prophecy.

It is necessary that there be moral systems. It would be impossible for such systems not to exist. In the order of the incarnation, morality is the culturalization, the concretion, of practical relationships. And social life can be lived only through practical relationships. "Ethics," on the other hand, consists of imperatives that are "transcendental" in the sense that they transcend, "go beyond," surmount, the purview of the established, prevailing, dominant moral order.

The subject or agent of the *moral* order is the *dominant* member of a given system. In feudalism it was the feudal lord. In capitalism it is the owner of capital. The subject or agent of the *ethical* order, on the other hand, is constituted by the dominated members, *the poor*, of that system. In feudalism it was the serf, in capitalism it is the wage-earner, the worker. Ethical imperatives are moral "counterimperatives." If morality says, "Respect the feudal lord," ethics says, "Liberate the serf." The latter imperative "transcends," calls into question, ordains the overcoming of, feudalism. It is an absolute, transcendental, critical imperative.

The ethic of the gospel-or better, the gospel as ethics-is not a morality. It does not propose concrete empirical norms. Nor indeed is it an ethics for one particular time and place: "Liberate the serf." If it were, it would no longer be valid for another, future system. Instead, it proclaims: "Blessed are the poor." The poor are universal. The "poor" in the gospel sense will be present *in any possible moral system*. The gospel "poor" are not this or that type of poor. They are the poor *as such*. Thus the gospel ethic constitutes an *absolute* imperative, not relative to this or that historical moral system.

## 10.5 MORALIZATION OF THE GOSPEL ETHIC IN CHRISTENDOM

Just as there cannot be ethics without morality (anymore than there could have been an incarnation in the sole person of the Word, without flesh), the ethical critique of a moral system (the Greco-Roman, for instance) de facto generates a *new* morality, a new moral world. Byzantine and Latin Christendom are the prime instances. This new moral order tends to be confused with the ethic of the gospel and thus to deny the authentic gospel ethic. This is the possible danger of the "social teaching" of the church today.

After Jesus, the Apostles, Apologists, the Fathers of the Church, the persecuted church of the poor, the church of the martyrs—all evangelized the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. The morality of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and so on—Hellenistic morality—like any other prevailing Mediterranean morality, was subjected by that church to a radical critique at the hands of the Christian ethic. But this new Christian world gradually came to regard itself as the City of God. The new civilization thought of itself as the reign of God on earth. And Christendom was born (9.9).

Thus a specious identity was struck between the historical, relative Byzantine and Latin morality on the one hand, and the ever-transcendental imperatives of the gospel ethic. For centuries thereafter, only the saints recalled the non-moralizable transcendence of the ethics of Jesus. But by the end of the Middle Ages, a goodly number of Christians had become the agents of a Christian ethical critique of the feudal world, and had begun laying the foundations of the capitalist world, in the corporations of the "poor" who crammed the medieval cities. Just so, it is our responsibility today, after the example of so many other Christians since the eighteenth century, to voice the Christian ethical critique of capitalistic "morality." So many Christians have identified with the latter in an absolute fashion, thus falling victim to the relativism of a historical bourgeois morality.

The task of Christians in Latin America today, as in the world at large, is precisely to recall the *transcendental* demands of the Christian ethic, which cannot be identified with the morality of capitalism. Moralities disappear. Ethics abides.

## 10.6 COMMUNAL CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Ethical imperatives are more than practical norms proposed for someone's hypothetical, ideal observance. They are the real, concrete constituents of the praxis and type of relationships actually lived today in the Christian *community* (see 1.1, 1.5, 1.9, 4.6).

The ethico-prophetic critique, voiced "from outside" (see 5.2); comes to us from a *real* (and not merely possible) experience of community (see 1.6, 1.9, 4.6). The reason this critique is capable of rejecting the domination of the prevailing system or its practical norms of domination is not that the prophet is endowed with a brilliant intelligence. No, even the simplest member of the community has the experience of a *community* life. It is this community life that supplies the *affirmative* "whence" of a declaration of the intrinsic connection between the condition of injustice and misery weighing on the oppressed in the system, and that system's prevailing *social* morality.

Any critico-prophetic *negation* of sin, then, proceeds from the *affirmation* of the utopian justice prevailing by anticipation in the base Christian community. This experience of being outside, this "analectic" experience (from the Greek, *ano*, "above, beyond"-beyond or transcending the horizon of the system in the experience of *another* way of living with one's sisters and brothers), is the reign of God *already begun* (1.9). And it is this reign of God that measures the ethicity of any praxis. The community *already* lives, in part, the future system of justice, and from its standpoint in that project (5.2) enjoys the capacity to judge, to condemn, the prevailing morality as perverse.

*Communal* Christian ethics is something very different from a morality that may have adopted reforms as a result of certain Christian imperatives. Thus the so-called social teaching of the church (see chap. 19) has consisted, until recently, in orientations calculated to *modify*, merely, the prevailing, dominating bourgeois morality. It is not an authentically prophetic ethic. It is only a reformed morality, whose purpose is to avoid "excesses." It accepts the foundations of bourgeois morality, as we shall see. The base Christian community criticizes that morality in a more radical and evangelical way. (This is not to say that the social teaching of the church has no validity.)

## 10.7 HOW DOES ETHICS CRITICIZE THE MORALITIES?

Ethics is the *affirmation* of life (4.8, 6.7) emerging from the experience of community, the experience of the relationship of a respectful love among sisters and brothers (1.4). If ethics is intrinsically affirmative, how can it be enunciated as *negation*: "You shall *not* kill, you shall *not* steal"?

As we have already observed, the act of killing is a negation of life: a "no to life." This being the case, a no to a "no to life" will be the negation of a negation, and thus an affirmation. The ethical critique is not fundamentally negative. The object or target of its negation is domination, sin, and satanic praxis (3.5, 2.10). It *asserts* the experience of community. It is not *destructive*, but *constructive*. However, it knows that the chrysalis (the old system of domination) has to be superseded for new life to emerge.

Were it not for morality, were it not for institutions, domination would lack the universality inherent in its reality. It would be sporadic, chaotic (see 2.5, 2.6). Ethics steps forward to lodge its prophetic criticism of institutional, historical, concrete sin, on the fulcrum of its affirmation of justice as lived in community (a *utopian* justice, to be sure, for it is lived outside the system). Ethics will have a different content in every age-as many different contents as the number of historical relative moralities it criticizes. Each time, ethics will criticize a different moral content. But its critique will always have the same formal rationale: it will be the *poor* in this particular moral or practical system who are "blessed, lucky, happy." It is they who constitute the criterion of the goodness or evil of institutions-nor must we ever forget that the poor, *here and now*, are Jesus Christ himself: the christological question. Speaking from the depths of the pain, the injustice suffered, the domination that deprives the poor of life in *this* system, the prophet directs a scathing regard upon this system's concrete institutions, denies and rejects these *social relationships*, judges them, and pronounces them, along with the very norms of "morality" that underlie them, *ethically* perverse. The validity of the ethical judgment is absolute, then. And yet it is concrete, inasmuch as *these* poor are distinct from all other poor (a serf is not a wage-earning worker).

## 10.8 MULTIPLICITY AND EVOLUTION OF MORALITIES

Necessarily, and appropriately, there are *many moralities*. Further: all moralities evolve historically from a germinal stage (in the case of Christendoms, from ethical demands, not by mere domination over other moralities)-subsequently to be swallowed up in the ages of the moralism of an imperial domination (at least in its Greco-Roman phase or the current *Pax Americana*).

It is appropriate, and good, that there be many moralities. They represent a phenomenon of human creativity that has never failed to mold the result of centuries of human experience into these practical totalities. What a marvelous sampler of balance, beauty, complexity, and symbolism we behold in the Inca or Aztec, the Chinese or Japanese, Hindu, and other, moralities! But this multiplicity must not be measured by the yardstick of *another morality*. And this is Christendom's perennial temptation. The Europeans who came to the New World regarded their morality not only as *superior*, but as *Christian*. Thus they were guilty of two errors: their morality was neither superior nor Christian (if by "Christian" we understand the prophetic *ethic* of the gospel).

The moralities of Portuguese, Spanish, English, or North American Christendom are so many different, specific *moralities*. They have been imposed on the Carib, Aztec, Incan, Bantu, Hindu, Nicaraguan, and other moralities by force. Only certain missionaries subjected these "Christian" moralities to the prophetic critique of the gospel ethic. But in doing so, they originated a new, Latin American, morality. The shining example here is that of Bartolomé de Las Casas. He valued the autochthonous moralities (see his *Apologética Histórica*). He subjected them to an ethical critique, but refused to destroy them as moralities.

Moralities undergo evolution. They have a history. It is only in their final stages, in their senility, as it were, that they become tyrannical, external, and authoritarian. It is when they have lost the *élan vital*, the vital thrust, of their youth that they must be subjected to the ethico-prophetic critique.

## 10.9 TRANSCENDENTAL UNIQUENESS OF THE GOSPEL ETHIC

Moralities are multiple, and subject to an evolution in time. Ethics is *one*, and enjoys permanent validity in virtue of its *absolute* character. It evolves much more slowly. It grows in the continuous exercise of its critique of the historical moralities. Ethical progress, from the "schools of the prophets" of eighth-century B.C. Israel to the twentieth century of our own era has been all but imperceptible. The Hebreo-Christian ethic received its definitive constitution in the good news preached by Jesus. It still had to be made to prevail over specific moralities—a process in which understanding was achieved, and categories implicit in the gospel were explicitly developed.

When I speak of the critico-transcendental uniqueness of ethics, I refer to the fact that ethics is *one* (vis-à-vis *many* moralities); that it is *transcendental* with respect to any and all moralities (the moralities are by definition immanent, intrasystemic); and that it takes its stance *over and against* the morality, negating and rejecting it in any of its dominative, unjust elements (from a standpoint, however, not in the principles of morality, nor even in any previously defined content of its own, but *from* that of *the poor* who are present in the system).

The old "natural law" teaching sought to attain to this pitch of ethical radicality. It never succeeded. "Natural law" had set itself the impossible, self-contradictory task of producing a positive enunciation of universally valid concrete principles from a point of departure in the prevailing morality. (In reality, it only raised the "justice" of that "morality" to the rank of "nature.") Ethics, by contrast, in its capacity as a prophetic-critical *horizon* merely, has no need to define its imperatives positively in advance. It need only negate the prevailing negation, starting from the affirmation lived by the base Christian communities of any age and time.

Accordingly, subjective poverty is an essential of the ethical community. This independence of goods (and institutions) liberates the community from the wealth of the prevailing system, and frees it to criticize the system and give it a new start, to bring in a new moral age.

## 10.10 THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORALIZING INCARNATION AND CRITICAL TRANSCENDENCE

An ethico-prophetic critique that destroys a moral world originates another world-another, new *moral* world. Moralities are the incarnation of the ethical critique. This is how the moralities of the Christendoms, of European feudalism, of capitalism, of socialism, came to be. The great millenarians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries practiced an ethical critique. So did the utopian socialists of the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. All were Christians.

I use the term "moralizing" to refer to the process that starts as part of an ethical critique, and gradually transforms that critique into a *new morality*. The ethico-prophetic Christian critique of the Greco-Roman moral world, starting from its "outsider" position in the base Christian communities of that day, was transmuted, over the course of the centuries, into European feudal Christendom, or into the Byzantine, Coptic, or Armenian world, and so on. The ethic of the original critique gradually trickled off into a prevailing, dominating morality, with its justification of economic, political, sexual, and other, sin.

This "moralizing" process is not only inevitable, it is needed. Ethics could not exist without morality. It would have to discontinue securing, attaining, institutionalizing its gains in history. *All world history*, until the Parousia itself, will be the scene of ethicity's self-actualization in the moralities.

At the same time, no sooner is a *new morality* constituted, no sooner has it emerged from the matrix of its originating ethical moment, than ethics is back on the scene, once again performing its function of destroying the calcified, the old, and the unjust, and thus launching history once more down its course to greater realizations. Being one, and absolute, ethics reappears through the intermediary of the prophets when the time is ripe, as in Latin America today.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have come to the end of the first part of this study. We have covered ten *basic* topics. It will probably have occurred to those

using this book that the number of topics in the first part could just as easily have been more or less than ten. Their number is unimportant. The important thing is to have constructed a *minimal*, but indispensable, platform from which to address more concrete, more complex, and more current problems, as we shall now be doing in the second part of this book. Throughout the second part it will be evident that the topics under consideration there are only corollaries of the ten themes of the first part. For some users of this book, the first half will have seemed too traditional and abstract, too timeless, as it were. But I could not have dispensed with a solid foundation erected on the rock of holy scripture and not on personal conjecture. Nor, as a matter of fact, do I make any apologies for the fact that my approach is a *traditional* one. This has been precisely my intention.

As for the last topic of Part 1-the topic just concluded, concerning the plurality of the moralities and the uniqueness of ethics (replacing the classic treatment of "natural and positive law"), I trust that the importance of such a consideration has been shown. In any event its utility will come to light in the course of Part 2.