

Theology of Empire

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The Theology of Empire emerged in the United States during the seventies and spread rapidly throughout the empire. This theology flouts bourgeois social conventions which see religion as a private matter. According to this theology, the bourgeois state assumes an explicit religious position and begins to take part in conflicts which occur among religious groups. A theological position is first expounded by the United States government and then is picked up by other governments. This position is publicly defended and enforced by their respective repressive police and military forces. All this involves a political theology based on the exercise of power wielded at an international level within the context of empire. In what follows, I shall try to formulate a thesis about the source and content of this phenomenon.

A Response to the Theology of Liberation

The Theology of Empire is clearly a reaction against, and an attempt to respond to the Theology of Liberation. The latter emerged in Latin America during the sixties and came to have a major public impact between 1970 and 1973 when it was affirmed by the Christians for Socialism movement in Chile during the Popular Unity government. The great influence of these groups and this theology was already notable not only in Latin America, but even in the United States. Nelson Rockefeller already had noted the importance of this theology during his trip through Latin America in 1968 and the subsequent Rockefeller Report advised paying particular attention to it. However, the experience of the Chilean Popular Unity government prepared the soil so

successfully that a massive reaction against the Theology of Liberation occurred.

This reaction had its roots in a U.S. religious movement which had been founded nearly a hundred years previously. This is Protestant fundamentalism, originally an apolitical religious movement with strong anti-state and anti-political biases. This early form of fundamentalism developed a current of thought, usually subdued, which saw politics as a worldly concern, foreign to religion when not outright hostile to it. This form of Protestant fundamentalism tended toward the formation of separate communities which embraced a puritanical ethic. The prohibitions against dancing, drinking, movie-going and smoking played an important ethical role. Though Protestant fundamentalism originally expressed mistrust

of politics and the state, it always has been very active in the field of economics.

It is attracted to and motivated by the pursuit of wealth and all types of commercial activity. The world which threatens the fundamentalist believer is the world of politics, not the world of the market. The believer can behave as s/he pleases within the sphere of the market without danger to the soul. However, the world of politics and the state, as well as the world of combative organizations operating at the base level, constitute a grave threat.

We are speaking, obviously, of relatively prosperous groups with a pronounced tendency to isolate themselves from all political activity. They see themselves as God's chosen ones, dividing the world between themselves and others in a Manichaean way. They perceive the state in apocalyptic terms and await the end of the world as an imminent event. They amass money in order to please God and they isolate themselves from others in order to protect their faith which is nothing more than the common places of a strictly interpreted Puritan ethic. They think in highly dogmatic terms and subscribe to a theology lacking any discernible subtlety. Nonetheless, they are convinced of the sustaining power of their beliefs using what they call a literal reading of the Bible. And, although this reading is markedly arbitrary, they would assert that it is the only possible literal one.

In the seventies, these groups were transformed into the raw material of a religious movement directed against the Theology of Liberation, and in favor of a new mass conservatism which in 1980 came to power in the United States with the electoral victory of Ronald Reagan. The preacher, Jerry Falwell, played an important role in this turn of events. He began a movement, the Moral Majority, which sprang directly from this fundamentalist tradition but whose importance goes far beyond this group. A mass conservatism appeared, an anti-popular mass movement strikingly similar to fascist movements of the 1920's and

1930's. These fundamentalist movements are strongly influenced by the recently emerged "electronic church" which, in effect, has taken on the task of spiritual leadership. These movements are now quite evident in society, supporting neo-liberal and neo-conservative political positions.

The opening of religious fundamentalists to overtly political matters was facilitated by the fact that the neo-liberal position produced--within the respective fields of economics and economic theory--a social model already developed in religious terms by fundamentalism. Although neo-liberalism is linked to another kind of private ethic, both groups have a common position regarding the state and political activity on the one hand, and the importance of the pursuit of profit and the workings of the market on the other.

This facilitated a common interest between neo-liberal politics and various fundamentalist currents. This made possible the transformation of fundamentalism into a political movement, a task fulfilled in particular by the electronic church. As a result, a government was elected which could assume explicit religious and theological positions in order to justify its imperialist policies. This also allowed a response to the Theology of Liberation which had become closely connected to movements at the base level throughout Latin America, with a theology of anti-liberation, making it possible to mobilize U.S. masses against popular movements in Latin America.

In order to respond to the political theology contained within the Theology of Liberation, an opposition theology of anti-liberation was created. The liberal state no longer sees religion as a private matter, but once again transforms it into a public one. Along with a confrontation of interests, a confrontation involving a religious conflict appears. Through this response to the Theology of Liberation, U.S. public powers assume their own theology. Associations such as the American Enterprise Institute now organize their own theological departments. The secret

services take on activities of religious promotion. The army and the police train specialists in theology. The president of the United States structures his discourse to promote a certain kind of religiosity.

Neo-liberalism and Fundamentalism: The Total Market

The new Theology of Empire has as its base U.S. Christian fundamentalism. However, this is only possible because the empire now has shifted to a vision of the world economy and the international market system that is strikingly different from the dominant vision of previous decades. Anti-state neo-liberalism has asserted itself and it corresponds very closely to this new vision of the world system.

The imperialist ideology of previous decades was properly interventionist capitalism which supported the reformist policy of the bourgeois state. The Alliance for Progress is one of the expressions of this general political orientation. In the late sixties and especially during the seventies this outlook changed dramatically. A profound skepticism toward capitalist intervention became apparent. Rather an impression emerged which posited that any reformism practiced by the bourgeois state served only to subvert the bourgeois character of the state itself. Bourgeois reformism itself seemed to contain a logic that eventually would destroy bourgeoisie society.

An important antecedent to this interpretation is the Chilean experience of the 1960's. The Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei initiated in Chile a serious and intense process of social reforms. This was particularly impressed in an agrarian reform program and in the promotion of a popular movement for organizing at the base level in urban slum areas as well as in the countryside. The political atmosphere influenced by the Alliance for Progress no doubt had contributed to circumstances that favored the emergence of these popular organizations. But this bourgeois reformism certainly con-

tributed decisively to the success of the Popular Unity in 1970. There seems to be a logical progression leading from the Alliance for Progress, with its reformist intention, to the Popular Unity, with its more revolutionary intent. Similar events occurred during the sixties in many other countries: in President Goulart's Brazil, within the Peronist movement in Argentina, in the Peruvian military dictatorship of General Alvarado, and within the Frente Amplio of Uruguay.

The empire sees itself endangered and is responding with a complete re-orientation of its general focus on the policy of reform. Neo-liberals as well as neo-conservatives have concluded from these experiences that reformist policies of the bourgeois state are no more than steps leading to the transformation of the bourgeois state into a socialist society. If the goal is to stabilize bourgeois society, it is necessary to renounce any systemic policy of social reforms and establish a strictly consistent capitalism.

The resulting neo-liberalism is anti-reformist and anti-interventionist with respect to the state and its relation to the market. The market is seen as the instrument capable of resolving all of society's problems, and the state ceases to have any function related to the market. If it does maintain any function, it is derived from the fact that there still exist interest groups who attempt to sue the state for reformist ends. The state thereby acquires this unique function of overcoming and eliminating the social movements which would use it to achieve these ends. If such social groups did not exist, there would be no state. The state, therefore, has its only legitimacy in the destruction of social forces which resist the market. It becomes a militant market state which is necessary precisely because of the lack of understanding by reformists and interventionists. It becomes a question of an "anti-state" state; a state dedicated to the destruction of the state so that the market can become the sole socializing medium of the entire society. It is a state which rapidly transforms it-



self into a terrorist state, a totalitarian state riding astride the total market.

This transformation of the market into a total market brings to an end an earlier stage of the capitalist system which rested upon the opposite experience. It was, in particular, the European experience. The reformism of the bourgeois state proved to be effective in confronting revolutionary movements which appeared during the 19th century. After the Second World War, especially, the reformist policies of the bourgeois state lead to the dismantling of these revolutionary movements after World War II, and to their subsequent integration into bourgeois society. They became the social democratic movements of today, oriented predominantly by the goals chosen within the possibilities for stability within bourgeois society. The assessment that emerged from this experience can be summed up in a phrase: from revolution to reform. European bourgeois societies of today are still marked by the impact of this experience. It also inspired the Alliance for Progress and the reformist government of Frei in the Chile of the 1960's. It was a self-assured reformism, confident of its ability to deal with all the realistic goals of socialist revolutionary movements within the framework of bourgeois society. This same feeling was able to inspire Latin American developmentalism in the 1950's and 1960's.

This confidence was broken during the 1960's and 1970's, which led to focussing on the opposite of the capitalist system. Latin American experiences during these decades pointed in the opposite direction. Populist and reformist movements were transformed into revolutionary movements. The Latin American experience of social reforms is one of deep frustration, resulting from its ineffectiveness and from the search for roads beyond bourgeois society that might guarantee the success of the reforms - roads not open in underdeveloped bourgeois society. It was bourgeois society's reformist impulse itself that led to revolutionary change. The more serious were the reformist commitments of bourgeois society. In effect, the reformisms of the 1950's and 1960's in Latin America were not simply demagogic. It was rather a movement that seriously sought solutions to urgent economic and social problems and was disposed to accept sacrifices in order to realize its goals.

It is precisely the seriousness of the reformist effort of this period that explains why reform movements restructure themselves and tend to transform themselves into revolutionary movements. A reformism without seriousness would have led to a demand for a more serious reformism. But there was no doubt about the seriousness of many of the bourgeois reformers of this period, such as those who promoted the developmentalism of CEPAL, and the model of import substitution. The same can be said of many social democratic or Christian Democratic parties of this time. There was a serious spirit of reform during this period, and a commitment to carry out reform.

Though these reformists wanted reforms, they wanted them realized within the framework of the stability of a bourgeois society. To the extent that this was impossible, these movements faced an alternative that turned out to be unacceptable. To carry out effectively the reforms initiated, a structural change was necessary--a change that could be nothing less than revolutionary. On the other hand, insisting on the stability of bourgeois society meant having to push back the reformist

impetus. The reformist movements of the 1960's and 1970's had to define themselves by their response to these two alternatives. As a result, they became divided. On one side, there appeared currents that defined themselves along the line of demanding structural changes, forming in the process new kinds of revolutionary movements. On the other, groups emerged that promoted an anti-reformist capitalism which appeared to be the only possible alternative to the revolutionary logic of the reformist impetus. With the appearance of revolutionary reformism as the only effective and realistic reformist perspective, bourgeois society defined itself in anti-reformist terms. All this is a question of a situation imposed by a simple logic of the facts. If some bourgeois reformism survives, it is really a matter of the cynical reformism of the anti-subversive war, which carries out reforms in order to break up popular movements and which revokes these reforms the moment a victory over the popular movement is realized. What we are referring to here is a demagogic reformism which can be seen in countries where a combative popular movement with the possibility of success exists, as in El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras. This type of demagogic reformism is not supported by any seriousness, because there is no profound conviction which concedes intrinsic legitimacy to the popular demand for satisfaction of basic needs, as did the reformism of the 1950's and 1960's.

The consequent polarization which now exists in Latin America is the polarization between reforms and capitalism. Reformism itself has been transformed into the inevitable demand for structural change, while capitalism has shifted toward the equally inevitable demand to abandon the reformist tradition and return to a brutal primitive capitalism that denies even the most basic human rights. Not only has it become a question of reforms or capitalism but also of human rights or capitalism. Obviously, the relationship between capitalism and reformism has changed profoundly. If in Europe it is still possible to say that the origins of the great reformist movements of today are to

be found in the revolutionary movement, in Latin America it can be said that the origin of the revolutionary movements of today can be found in the reform movement. Imperialism reacts to this fact. In order to save capitalism, it sacrifices the liberal humanism of another period and transforms capitalism into a blatant regimen of human destruction in the name of capital and the market.

There is a grain of truth in this position: reformism today implies a change from capitalism toward socialism. Within the context of imperial ideology this leads to considering all reformists as socialists, whether conscious or not. Consequently, this leads to a new manichaeian polarization which specifically permits the alliance of neo-liberalism with Christian fundamentalism, as occurred in the 1970's in the United States, and has been exported from the U.S. to all parts of the empire.

Empire and Market: Money as God

By rigidly counterpoising capitalism and social reforms or capitalism and human rights--both social and economic--imperialist ideology becomes clearly Manichaeian. A transcendent principal of polarization is introduced into social struggles, which asserts that the destruction of one pole--that of social reforms--makes possible the realization of the aspirations of the other pole: the heavenly harmony of all market forces. The market is seen as the way to obtain the absolute wellbeing of humanity, its maximum utopia, to be accomplished by the destruction and elimination of any kind of resistance to the market. In this way, the world is polarized between God and the devil, between the reign of good and the reign of evil, between the new Jerusalem promised by the market and the apocalyptic beast produced by reformism interventionism and economic planning. The god appears who is glorified in the destruction of enemies and whose honor is vengeance for the offenses they have committed. By identifying the devil, the beast, and economic and social reforms, the devil and the beast are identified with social

justice for the poor. Therefore, the god's honor is the destruction of the poor, of the popular movements and all recognition of the right to a decent life for all. A god who would devour the poor appears, who is no more than a transcendentalized personification of the laws of the market, a god who demands sacrifice and not mercy. The deification of the market creates a god who is money: in god we trust.

This relationship with the god-market is completely sacrificial. The death of this god's enemy is the life of the god itself, and of those associated with it. Death gives birth to life; destruction of resistance, to the destructive results of the market. And from the death of those who resist is born the bright utopia of the pre-established harmony of the market. It is not simply a question of acknowledging that there is destruction along life's way. Destruction and death themselves now appear to be salvific. The market itself is transformed into a sacrificial altar and living for the market becomes a religious act.

This theology always takes as its starting point a theology of God the creator who created human beings in such a way that as this human creature comes truly to know itself, it comes also to understand the market as the basic law that the creator-god has implanted in its very own nature and in its own soul. As a human creature comes to know this law, its heart longs to carry it out. The natural creation itself, the real natural world, is it not simply the source for working out the law? This law is the law of monetary value, the only law of God worth taking seriously. So the natural law of the ancients, especially of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, is set aside - this being a law of concrete life that concedes to the human being the right to live. The new natural law identified with the law of value only recognizes the life in the market, to which all human life must be sacrificed if need be. The natural law of the ancients sacrificed the law of value for concrete human life. The new literal natural law

now sacrifices concrete human life to the demands of the law of value and the market. God the creator has been transformed into the creator of the law of value and the market. This god created the concrete world around us simply as the field of application of the central law: money and capital. What the liberal tradition calls nature has nothing to do with actual nature. Therefore, it will never be protected by protecting trees and animals. Protecting trees and animals is seen rather as a rebellion against nature if this would entail restricting the economic laws of the market. Even if all the trees were destroyed, nature would be adequately protected if this destruction were carried out within the framework of a market economy seeking the maximization of profit. God the creator has made it so, and therefore runs the risks and deals with the consequences. To resist this state of affairs would be human vanity.

All this explains the affinity of this Theology of Empire with certain apocalyptic tendencies. When the authors of this theology perceive the destructive character of the system and the potential it has to terminate human life itself, they create a hope beyond total destruction expressed by the apocalyptic millennium. Although the world may be destroyed because of human faithfulness to the laws of the market, God promises a millennium to those who obey these laws though the earth perish because of them. God demands collaboration because earth's destruction has to take place in order for humanity's millennium to be realized. The Theology of Empire maintains this apocalyptic perspective which gives it its apparent coherence. It can promote its basic outlook without bothering about the survival of anyone, not even of itself. There is again a sense of sacrifice. The destruction of the earth and of humanity is presented as a required sacrifice which will produce the glory of the millennium. This perception of the millennium does not conserve any sense of human liberation, but rather is the legitimization of the absolute domination of human beings. The apocalypse becomes the great human self-sacrifice which brings redemption.



In the modern age and especially during this century, belief in the apocalypse and hope in the millennium have taken this form. They increasingly have acquired this sense of destructive escape which legitimizes oppressive systems beyond human existence and its collective suicide. As modern thought has focussed on praxis, references to the millennium have been transformed into the negation of liberating praxis and justification of the final destruction of this earth in order to realize the promise of a new world beyond this destruction. In this way, total destruction is apparently given a rationale that also justifies the unlimited continuation of a destructive socio-economic system.

The Nazis during the 1930's were the first to realize the ideological effectiveness of this version of millennial thought. When they spoke of their empire as a millennium (the thousand-year Reich) or as the Third Reich they also established this reference, taking advantage of the concept of the millennium to legitimize their collective suicide. They appropriated it with the same sacrificial sense which leads to the sacrifice of others in order to achieve their millennium. The holocaust of the Jewish people is inscribed in this mentality of sacrifice.

The Theology of Empire is repeating this phenomenon and seems to be

having success similar to the Nazis, although the market is now the focus of attention, not the superior race. However, the struggle among the races propagated by the Nazis was nothing more than a Darwinian transformation of the struggle among competing markets. Both have the same root which is a rebellion of a dominant class against the right to life for all.

Ethical Individualism: The Privatization of Ethics

This Theology of Empire contains an ethic based on the individual as a solitary being confronting an exterior world made up of an objective nature and a conglomeration of other individuals. This ethical individualism recognizes market value alone as what defines an individual's relationships with the exterior world: private property and fidelity to contracts. Even respect for the life of others is transformed into a question of private property; each person has his or her own body. Human rights themselves are transformed into the right to private ownership of oneself, and matrimony becomes a contract like any other. Outside this world of contracts, obligations do not exist and natural right means recognizing these contracts as the only legitimate basis of ethics. Ethics and trade relationships cease to be differentiated and become indistinguishable. In this individualist ethic even justice becomes identified with the honoring of contracts, and it is never admissible to contest them. Private property and the honoring of contracts: that is justice. Outside this justice, charity may also exist as a value. But it is neither an ethical norm nor an obligation. It should not interfere with justice, but should refer only to recommendations regarding justly obtained economic results. Any outcome of the market's functioning is just as long as contracts and property have been respected. However, an individual is free to determine the use of income earned in the market. An individual can freely dispose of income provided his or her actions never interfere with the idea that justice means the free working of the market. Therefore, an individual may use money earned

in the market for charitable purposes. But beyond the market there are no obligations.

In this way, liberal ethics constitute a private sphere that is not determined by the ethics of private property and the honoring of contracts, but which does not interfere with them. It presupposes, therefore, the strict observance of an individualistic ethic. Private ethics are the ethics of the individual which are determined within the framework of freedom allowed by individualist ethics, an ethic which refers to the type of life lived by an individual without interfering with his/her other individuality. It is an ethic which takes advantage of the space individualist ethics leaves open and free for private behavior. Within fundamentalist Christianity this private ethic is an ethic that is formally and rigorously puritanical. It demands abstention from drinking, smoking and dancing, but at the same time is a work ethic in function of an individualistic ethic. It highlights, therefore, individualistic values in the participation, through work, in the struggle among markets.

It is a question of a pitiless ethic that demands the investment of all values connected to actual daily life. By privatizing the ethics of daily behavior, it destroys any direct relationship with other human beings and reduces all relationships to those mediated by the market. It demands a hardness of heart never before seen, which transforms any human relationship into an abstract relationship between objects. It transforms "ungiving-ness" into the highest ethical principle, and the destruction of the other into a categorical imperative. Faced with the problem of unemployment, it does not react by demanding a solution to this problem but by recommending that the unemployed endure their situation because some day the market will resolve this problem. But it is necessary to allow the free activity of the market, and never interfere with it. Until the market functions more successfully, one may give charity to the unemployed, but the unemployed may never demand it. Faced with misery, one must not act, rather one must wait for the market

to resolve economic problems. Possibly, one might give alms, but ethics obliges one not to question the reasons why poverty itself exists. The same attitudes are promoted regarding the external debt of Third World countries. Ethics require that the debt be paid, even though three continents may perish. Regarding the consequences, charity may make up for a portion of the wealth extracted in payment of the debts. But justice demands payment without compassion, as a categorical imperative.

Achieving the capacity to treat other human beings in these terms is certainly a moral problem very difficult to solve. It is morally difficult to allow the unemployed to languish in desperate conditions without taking some action. It is difficult to leave people who are poor and miserable in that condition without being moved to compassion. It is difficult to demand payment of the external debt when one knows that an unprecedented genocide will result. It is still more difficult to make of all this behavior a duty, a categorical imperative. All spontaneous morality rebels against such behavior. This individualistic ethic, however, must achieve all this. For human beings faced with misery to decide to do nothing, and to feel that doing nothing is an ethical duty or even a categorical imperative, there must be an inversion of all spontaneously acquired values. In ordinary daily life one learns exactly the opposite. One learns to help one's neighbor and not to tolerate his or her misery. In individualistic ethics, on the other hand, one learns not to help, to tolerate misery infinitely. In effect, what is needed is a change of hearts. Therefore, individualistic and privatized ethics speak constantly of a change of heart. The human heart must change in order to acquire the hardness or indifference necessary to create a subject capable of perceiving the destruction of the other as a supreme ethical good.

This ethic is not passive, rather it is extremely active. It is an ethic of feverish and pitiless market activism, and of passivity toward

its disastrous results on others. It is an ethic of the solitary individual who struggles with God against all others, and who assures his/her solitary existence by aggression against any intent to change the destructive character of this market machinery and its laissez-faire mercantile practices.

The very nature of this ethic goes against any commitment to human solidarity, which it condemns as primitive behaviour. Once interiorized, this ethic reacts, in the name of the highest human values, against any sense of solidarity. It interprets manifestations of human solidarity as human pride, even anti-Christ. Therefore, this ethic gives an ideal support to the current Theology of Empire, which, in a certain sense, is nothing more than the political and theological expression of individualistic ethics. Certainly, Christian fundamentalism in the United States has developed in the atmosphere of individualist ethics, which explains why, as it has become politicized, it has come out in support of today's Theology of Empire. Of course individualistic ethics are not necessarily puritanical in the way they are manifested within the fundamentalist movement. Fundamentalism is a private ethic which presupposes and integrates individualistic ethics. However, individualistic ethics can combine with other private ethics. The only necessary condition is that they be private ethics which will not interfere with the supremacy of an individualistic ethics. The pre-conciliar social doctrine of the Catholic Church is largely an example of this type of private ethic. The church had surrendered itself to the primacy of individualistic ethics and had developed itself along the lines of a private ethic within the space left open by individualist ethics. The church only appears to confront this ethic. But even a libertine ethic can accommodate itself very comfortably. The liberal-individualistic mansion has many rooms. But all of them are painted the same color.

However, the politicization of Christian fundamentalism and its integration into mass conservatism had to include this puritanical

ethic as part of its ideological orientation. This responds to the political needs of the empire, especially to the need to formulate a movement counterposed to the Theology of Liberation. The element allowed a reformulation of the basic right to life within the framework of individualistic ethics.

The Theology of Liberation was developed during the 1970's as a theology of life. Liberation was conceived as a condition that guarantees all the right to life, and assures all the opportunity to satisfy their basic needs through their work. From the starting point of being a theology of life in this sense, it could become integrated with political projects oriented concretely toward liberation. The result was its close involvement with socialist movements. The Theology of Empire had to oppose itself to this theology of human life in order to undermine it. It did something which, from the beginning of the century, fascist movements have done when faced with socialism's program for life, dating back to the 19th century. Fascism created a philosophy of life along the lines of Nietzschean thought which is nothing more than a philosophy of death disguised as a philosophy of life. It sees life as vitality, achieving its fullest expression by destroying the enemy in order to enjoy the victor's relish of conquest. It is a concept of life in which one's greatest moment is realized by inflicting death on another, and the sense of being victor in a battle to the death is the maximum experience that life offers. This attitude results in the tragic celebration of struggle in which combatants kill one another in order to discover their unity at the moment of death. All fascist literature celebrates this struggle and its tragic end as the true struggle and, therefore, as true life. (We also find this kind of celebration in Vargas Llosa's The War of the End of the World, a work riddled with the kind of fascist ideology of life as the experience of death, whether someone else's, or one's own.)

In the ideology of the empire, this perspective on life plays a similar role. However, it doesn't appear in



the same form when applied to theology. This theology must affirm human life, but without compromising the individualist ethic. Therefore, it cannot affirm life in the concrete way that the Theology of Liberation does. But, neither can it serve the ideology of the empire without making any attempt to validate life. It seeks to do this by referring to the life of the unborn and by declaring the right to birth as the right to life. Faced with a concept of the right to life which threatens the empire, and which is articulated by Theology of Liberation, propaganda machine is created in favor of a right to life which is totally irrelevant to the subsistence of the empire. The right to life, in this case, is totally privatized and individuals alone decide whether it will be bestowed or withheld. It ceases to be a social problem and becomes a problem faced by an individual. Although the state intervenes legally against abortion, this is a matter of an obligation regarding one particular private ethic as opposed to another, rather than calling into question the private character of this ethic. In this way, the theology of the empire affirms the right to life of the unborn in order to avoid recognizing the right to life of human

beings already born. This theology becomes extremely inflexible regarding this point.

However, abortion is the product of an attitude towards human life that the Theology of Empire itself promotes. It simply extends the treatment the system normally affords human beings to those unborn. The legitimation of abortion is nothing more than the freedom to treat unborn human life in the same way the system treats human beings that are already born. There is not the slightest contradiction between these two behaviors. Liberal ethics have no argument for demanding special treatment for the unborn. Just as it would kill or allow the poor to die, it would kill or allow the unborn to die. Nonetheless, for ideological reasons, the right to be born is now favored, while the ethics themselves lead to the very problem of negating the right to life. Only an affirmation of the right to life of those already born can produce a new ethic which would extend the recognition of the human right to life to the unborn. The Theology of Empire, by negating the only possible source of a new ethic toward the unborn, becomes one of the causes of the problem it purports to attack.

However, now it has the banner it needed to confront the Theology of Liberation in the name of some "essential" or "true" right to life. But it continues to be nothing more than a way of affirming a right to kill.

What this amounts to is a very consistent theological compliment to the ideological system which now confronts the Theology of Liberation. There is now a theological stance which permits the empire to confront, on all fields, Latin American and Third World liberation movements. Its only weakness is that it celebrates death disguised as life.

But this is its decisive weakness. Third World people are not seeking a death that dissembles as life. Rather, they are seeking the concrete possibility for living.