

Meditations on a Country Named Chile
October--November, 1973

A.

1. When a nation dies and is led away
Then it understands what the prophets say:
When you stand on the ruins of the Holy Place
Then you see it was the Lord staring in your face.
2. See how lovely she sits who was once so fair.
She has not ceased to cry, she has tears to spare.
No one comes to pray, no one comes to mourn.
Everyone can see her now, all her glory gone.
3. The yoke of my sins weighs down upon me.
I have seen my love condemned to this misery.
Once the wine would flow at our command.
Now the city's turn to be in the presser's hand.
4. How can she be described, to what does she compare?
Who could ever comfort her in her great despair?
All who pass this way nod their heads in glee.
All the low and wretched men have more than she.
(Variation on the Lamentations)

B.

Midst the intrigues of this world and its governing principles, the word of the Lord makes its way, alive and active, the double-edged sword which penetrates the secrets of emotions and thoughts and confronts them with the terrible light. It is this light and this light alone which should be the measure of our moral judgements, and we have the duty to draw near to it, to do all we can to reevaluate what we have received as our historical and cultural heritage, what our warped inclinations, often accepted without analysis, tend to deform.

What has happened in Chile can be interpreted on various levels--sociological, political, economical--it is also susceptible of a moral evaluation--and I believe that this moral interpretation is the basis of a symbolic one in as much as it announces a kingdom yet to come, proclaimed and still hoped for, which our humble human history is preparing us to receive. The gifts of God, even the most gratuitous, correspond to a disposition in the hearts of men--and the ways by which the Lord leads us to receive His gifts have a certain analogy with one another.

C.

There are two overall visions of society at least in Latin America, at the present time; both repose on a few basic underlying postulates which need to be analysed.

The first vision, the more traditional one, emphasizes the inherent differences among men. These inherent differences define social functions within the society and these functions, in their turn, found social classes. These differences are of the natural order and as such depend ultimately on the will of God--as does the social structuration which derives from them. Thus it is that "the poor will always be with us," that they are the blessed who will inherit the earth. Oftentimes, beneath such a conception lies something of the Old Testament identification of material richness and success with virtue--and of poverty and

disgrace with vice and sin. In passing it may be noted that such a concept is equally applied to collectivities. Let us think only of the rhetoric which surround our Thanksgiving Day, for example, and our "divine mission" within the international community.

A fundamental vision of this type determines too the definition of the dominating values within a society. Peace, the tranquility of order, is the harmonious and vertical juxtaposition of social functions and classes. Justice, the giving to each one his "due" is the rendering of a proportionate "due" to each one according to his position. Within such a vision more is due to some than to others...in the name of the "natural order" as usual. Love, or "charity", too means willing to each the good which corresponds to his ranking in this natural hierarchy; one must love the superior with the respect due to his position and the inferior with an appropriate pity. In such a context the virtue of the rich consists in giving alms and treating with condescension their poor neighbors...considered more or less as sinners--poverty being the wage of some sort of sin. The role of the poor is to accept patiently their lot and the blessed occasion which God has given them to expiate by their "natural" penance. They ought to be grateful, of course, to their benefactors.

The other vision of society sees the class differences as the manifestation in the social order of the dialectic inherent in the natural (material) order. According to this perspective the division of society into classes is the historical fruit of the exploitation of the majority by a group which possesses the means of production. As in the natural the necessary dialectical opposition is only the means to arrive at a superior synthesis. In such a rigid application of dialectical materialism, the truth of the moral order consists in adjusting itself, to the evolutionary process.

Both visions thus try to justify themselves by basing themselves on the natural order viewed as an essentially fixed and stable sort of thing in the first case, as an essentially dynamic historical evolution in the second.

It seems quite clear to me that neither of these visions such as expressed here in all their dogmatical rigor (and simplified greatly but not I hope, essentially betrayed) can be acceptable to a modern Christian more or less enlightened by a certain evolution of our moral awareness. What is very much lacking is a serious theology of history --not just of holy history, of the progression of God's revealing word, but of our poor human history as well, viewed in the light of the revealed word.

I don't pretend to be able to elaborate such a theology, but in its absence I think we can single out a few basic postulates as, for instance; a) the history of salvation has a revealed term and an internal law which can be induced. A careful inductive method, applied ~~legit~~ loyally, would reveal a certain analogy with material evolution. This ought not to unduly surprise since the Divine action, whatever its term, identifies itself to the immutable Essence of God and the final

century of material evolution is the new heaven and the new earth, the material environment of the risen saints of God.
 b) If God's revealing action is the motor force of Holy history, that of human history is man's liberty. That does not imply, however, the existence of two "parallel" histories; if man's only true historical end is supernatural all human history has transcendental repercussions in good and in evil. Human history has it's own law which can also be induced and a principal motor force proper to it--yet it is at the same time subordinated to and assumed by salvation history. All this is enveloped in the great mystery of God's transcendent action which creates our liberty and guides it to it's term without violating it--giving it on the contrary all its reality. To sum up once again, human history has it's own law and autonomy, but the mysterious delicateness of God's transcendent action assumes it and subordinates it to the final term of all history--and to the law of Holy History.

If the preceding postulates are acceptable it can be deduced that there is no "natural law" which defines social structures; it is man's free will ~~which defines~~ but immersed in an historical process, conditioned by the weight of the past, for the better or for the worse.

The accumulated weight of our free options structure our society and since these options are basically free they are not, in themselves, subject to any predetermined law. Since these structures are the fruit of free options they are subject like the options themselves to a moral evaluation. They are the fruits of the work of grace or of the work of sin, of the twofold force which permeates our human history. In the measure in which our accumulated free acts crystalize into structures, these structures in their turn exercise a certain determination of our acts.

In such a context it isn't impossible to characterize certain social structures as predominantly the historical fruit of sin as we can characterize others as marked by the work of grace refining the social awareness of mankind throughout the ages (it is obvious of course that all things human are a mixture of grace and of sin...here it is a question of predominating traits.)

But on the other hand this human history of ours, freely determined and subject to all the play of our caprices, charged more and more by the historical weight of grace as by that of sin, has an intrinsic term: the preparation of mankind to receive the final gift of God...the heavenly Jerusalem. The definitive kingdom. It is only in the light of this ultimate term that any given historical event or state takes on it's true signification.

Finally I think it can be stated--and in this lies the basic truth of the intuitions of Marx--that the range of human relations determined by our free acts is not unlimited--that it is subject to certain constants, and that these constants can be induced and analyzed, thus furnishing a certain "science" and permitting a certain "domination" of human history.

Applying all the foresaid to the social forces at work in Chile today I think we can make the following judgments.

The structures of Chilean society and the aspiration which

defend themselves and their families from the invasion of the "marxist hordes." The poor found all this quite amusing...it had never entered their heads to initiate physical violence...it was simply unthinkable and because they couldn't conceive of using it they couldn't really imagine it being used against them. And all that was perhaps the basic reason why they were so ill-prepared to defend themselves. Such a repression was quite simply incredible, intolerable, unacceptable. But for the other side it was not! And it was quite simply the most eloquent expression of these basic sentiments of the upper class and so many of the middle class...a real hatred and despising of what menaced their status as privilege and hauteur and contempt for the "scum" from which they so carefully distinguished themselves.

The presentation I have just made might seem simplistic; it perhaps is...yet I sincerely believe that such a reduction is necessary if we are to realize the true depth of what has happened in Chile.

It is the triumph of violence, of repression, of egoism and the death of an ideal, naive perhaps and often contradicted in practice, but an ideal all the same which made a lot of people better, which awakened sentiments of solidarity and altruism, of dignity and hope in the "rotos" the broken-down ones of Chile. In a very real sense it is the victory of hatred over love, and in that measure of darkness over light. A good deal of love has probably been irreparably destroyed in Chile, for the next time around it is difficult to imagine how it could be other than "eye for eye and tooth for tooth."

All of this poses serious problems to the "peace-makers" and advocates of non-violence. It would seem proves, in the very concrete case of Chile that the morality of the beatitudes (which, it is true, was practised more than it was preached.) has shown itself to be inefficacious. It left the people defenseless in the face of the repression and facilitated the latter. As a political and collective solution it prejudiced the cause it pretended to serve. This raises a certain number of questions for the moral theologians in that domain too the lack of a historical perspective has perhaps made itself felt. We're living in a world which isn't exactly all that God intended it to be. Man's sin has taken its toll on the concrete reality we have to confront and we have to define ourselves with evangelical innocence and prudence in very real historical situations. Perhaps it would be good to look more closely at Machiavelli's criticism of Christian ethics.

D.

There is a mystery of our faith, announced at the end of our Creed of which no one speaks too much any more, yet it reveals a dimension of our individual and collective destinies which ought never to be left out of sight: the communion of the saints or, as Leon Bloy used to call it, the "doctrine of reciprocity." It is only in the light of this mystery that our acts take on their true dimensions insofar as they contribute to shape human history and thus condition the options of others...insofar as we complete (or refuse to complete) the sufferings of Christ in His body which is the Church and thus participate in the work of the co-redemption. And in so far as each of our moral acts contributes to the construction of the final condition, of the heavenly Jerusalem and thus has an aspect which shall never pass away.

The mystery of the co-redemption seen in the context of the communion of the saints, is the transcendental and revealed dimension of our historical social solidarity. The intercommunication of the merits of the saints knows no limitations neither of time nor of space...nor does it lack the social consequence of our sins. Leon Bloy knew how to express all this in his hyperbolic style well-suited to suggesting certain aspects of the mysteries. The sanctity of a Joan of Arc, for example, might well have been merited by the prayers of some unknown beggar whose soul had a mysterious affinity to that of Joan. Let us think too of the intercession of Abraham which places all its hope on the ten just...or of the legendary innocent who sustains the world.

The wages of sin must be paid according to a sort of immanent justice which the Divine Providence deals out according to its own laws. It is, as it were, the repartition of the work of co-redemption. Blessed are those chosen to share this task of Jesus...of them the Tyrenian is forever the symbol. More often than not they will not have dared to offer themselves for this task; they will not have chosen Jesus but will have been chosen by Him. The Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices and those killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam were not more guilty than the other inhabitants of Jerusalem...and yet their death announced that of Jesus and was linked to the iniquity of the Holy City.

The death of the poor and innocent, especially the violent death, is at the same time prophecy and mystery. The poor by their very state are the intercessors, the coresponders who pay the price of the sin of the world. And woe to those of us who make them pay such a price. Their very suffering, be it voluntary or not, consciously offered or simply endured, identifies them to Jesus and the saving mystery. In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus doesn't say that the consoled beggar did anything extraordinary in his life...or even that he was a believer. He was taken into the bosom of Abraham simply because he had suffered unjustly, had lived out his redemptive destiny which the rich man himself recognized when it was too late to beg his intercession. This same identification of the poor and suffering as such to Jesus is illustrated also in the Judgment scene where final destinies are divided according to one's attitude towards the afflicted.

That is the true significance of the passion of the poor of ~~while~~ ⁱⁿ them it is Jesus who is unjustly detained, tried, humiliated and condemned to death. It is the son of Man who is hunted down like a dog and black-listed and counted among thieves "yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies the punishment that brings us peace and through his wounds we are healed." Upon them is the sin of the world and this is the price of what we call peace.

- E. It is the hour of the Prince of Darkness; his legions have triumphed and gorge themselves with the spoils. His hatred and violence has vanquished a great deal of naive love. Christ is raised on high in the heat of the afternoon midst the dust and mocking and banality. The unthinkable has come about and the confusion is total. And in three days or in 40 days or more we know that death will be conquered and that the spirit will descent...that we know; the final victory is ours. It will come, we know not how, in the transforming breeze or in the apocalyptic thunder. "Come! say the Spirit and the Bride. Amen, come Lord Jesus."

The consolers of Israel the old and of Israel the new have promised it and that day will come though we know not when...tomorrow, or the day after or perhaps in a little while. It will come, the heavenly Jerusalem...it will come down from God...it will be his gift. And yet all that we do is a preparation to receive it. The final and definitive gift is a collective gift...it is the term of all human history, it is the ultimate object of our hope. All that is done, in good and in evil, throughout the course of human history enters into the construction of the Heavenly Jerusalem, of the definitive state and, as such, shall never pass away. There will be a new heaven and a new earth which we will have prepared and which the final divine touch will transform to reveal its full dimensions...and if this new heaven and earth will be the delight of the risen saints, it will be at the same time the place of torment of the risen damned.

Human history is the weaving of a tapestry. The patterns repeat themselves, intertwine and depend on one another. When all is completed everything has its place. So does the passion of Chile. It calls forth announcements and prepares the new Jerusalem where "at last God has his dwelling among men. He will dwell among them and they shall be his people and God Himself shall be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be an end to death and to mourning and crying and pain; for the old order has passed away."

"When he broke the fifth seal I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for God's word and for the testimony they bore. They gave a great cry: 'How long sovereign Lord, holy and true, must it be before thou wilt vindicate us and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?' Each of them was given a white robe; and they were told to rest a little while longer until the tally should be complete of all their brothers in Christ's service who were to be killed as they had been."

F - The Mission of the Church.

The Church is essentially mystery...the mystery of the Mystical Body of Jesus...a mystery known only to God. The human expression is terribly inadequate as are all the words with which we try to hint at the depths of God's love. Essentially bearer of truth and of life, the Church in so far as she is a human institution is subject to all the laws and ambiguity of human history. That we know all too well. There are certain analogies between the Church of Israel and the Church of the Apostles. The first call of the patriarchs, the liberation from Egypt, the fragile heroism of the desert community, the installation in a land and the conquering of countries, the Kingdom of Israel and its golden age and its internal disintegration which in the end led it to persecute and stone the prophets and crucify the Son of God. We sometimes tend to forget that. It was the Israel of God, bearer of the life-giving truth and hope (The Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses...do what they say!) which as an institution crucified the Truth and the Hope of the nations. Yet Israel fulfilled its essential role from it was issued the Virgin who alone was worthy to receive the Word...and the Apostles who so well preached the Good News. Any human institution even though it be of divine origin and guaranteed in its essential truth can become top-heavy...tends to get caught up in its structures and to absolutize the relative.

Whether we like it or not Constantine was converted (as Saul was anointed) and that has marked the Church's structure down to the present day. The charismatic community was put under the protection of the powers of this world and there was a sort of reciprocal penetration. Perhaps it was from this time on (or was it already so before??) that "convert the king and you convert the people" became the axiom of missionary activity. Whatever may have been the value of that axiom in times past its survival and its consequences in Latin America has been to say the least regrettable. In a class society the institutional Church appears intimately linked with the ruling classes. The masters had been evangelised and their serfs followed them...but now that the "serfs" have begun to be intoxicated with the wine of liberation and no longer want to follow their masters...? In such a context the institutional Church appears as part of the oppressive structure...and is it only a question of appearance? The rich are the Church's benefactors, the most pious. They give alms and are kind and charitable to the poor who assume their lot with resignation. How often have we heard the consoling beatitudes, but how seldom the curses which follow. In a certain sense Marx's criticism of religion as the opium of the people carries a lot of weight. The institutional Church accommodated itself quite well to certain structures, to the mentality of a certain class and these structures are not seriously menaced.

Medellin spoke at length of the Church of the poor. The logical consequence of this identification with the poor is that the Church cease to be the Church of the rich. It means quite simply that the Church identify herself with the oppressed and suffering...not coming from without, as it were, but vitally letting herself be molded from within.

In a context of class struggle such as we lived in Chile, the Church as an institution was divided down the middle. Despite the hierarchy's claims to be "above" such a struggle and to lament this division which threatened the existing order, the institution as such took sides and as usual it went with the powerful of this world. It founded its "unity" as an institution on certain middle and upper class values...on a sensitivity and vision which was that of a group.

I don't believe that such a rallying point was necessarily of divine origin - institution. As long as men are divided into classes with distinct and oftentimes opposing interests and outlooks the Church must decide on which of these perspectives it is going to base her unity. It would seem to me to be more in conformity with the "lifestyle" of her founder to throw in her lot once and for all with the poor and oppressed, to become again the friend and companion of the fishermen and prostitutes. She will not hesitate to accept the hospitality of the rich, but only if her friends are also invited.

I think it could even be legitimately asked whether it be indispensable that the Church continue to exist as an institution in the sense of an independent power structure...whether such a structure will not become (if it isn't already) an obstacle to the Church's role as leaven in the mass.

"I saw no temple in the city; for the temple was the sovereign Lord God and the Lamb. And the city had no need of sun or moon to

shine upon it; for the glory of God gave it light and its lamp was the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk and the kings of the earth shall bring into it all their splendor. The gates of the city shall never be shut by day and there will be no night. The wealth and splendor of the nations shall be brought into it; but nothing unclean shall enter, nor anyone whose ways are false, but only those who are inscribed in the Lamb's roll of the living.

"Then he showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the city's street. On either side of the river stood a tree of life which yields twelve crops of fruit; one for each month of the year. The leaves of the trees serve for the healing of the nations. Every accursed thing shall disappear. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see him face to face, and have his name on their foreheads. There will be no more night, nor will they need the light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light; and they shall reign forevermore."

G - Annex

Just a few words about the Church and Marxism. As a philosophy Marxism is as opposed to Christianity as the positivism of the 17th century founders of the liberal state. As an instrument of social change in Latin America Marxism is at present the only effective existing means. At this stage of the game not to work with Marxism is to work against all real possibility of changing social structures. We might be able to dream of something pure, more Christian, but we would first have to invent it and then render it efficacious...and it would have to collaborate with the Marxist movement anyway, at least in some manner. Until such a system is invented and proves its worth in the practice we will just be remaining in an ivory tower and celebrating by our inactivity in the conservation of the existing system. By collaborating with Marxism the Christian can bring something of his originality and accentuate the more positive and pure aspirations of Marxism. To refuse this collaboration is to oppose one's self to the liberation movement...and to merit the consequences of this movement's triumph.