

**A SPECIOUS ALTERNATIVE: THE THIRD WAY
(THE PRESENT TEMPTATION OF THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA)
by Enrique Dussel**

*You are neither cold nor hot,
I will spew you out of my mouth.*
(Revelation)

May it not be said of our Church that which the prophet wrote of the church of Laodicea! "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3: 15-16).

The lukewarm person believes he has found the happy medium, that he has not fallen into extremes; he thinks he is prudent, wise, intelligent. However, he is only a lukewarm, indecisive, passive spectator of history. It is in the light of this revealed text that we wish to consider an increasingly common position in our Latin American Church in the face of the Third Conference of the Latin American Episcopate to be held in Puebla de los Angeles, land of the tlaxcaltecas, warlike and invincible enemies of the aztecs - the Empire in power. It is the first diocese on the American continent, founded in 1519, which had as its first bishop the valiant dominican Fray Julian Garcés, of whom it is known that "he greatly aided the *indios*"¹ and who was the author of the famous Latin letter sent to Pope Paul III in 1536 in which he exalted the human dignity of the poor of his time, the natives of America². This he did, even though he called his *own* see, Tlaxcala (which after his death was transferred to Puebla in 1543, where years later the no good cautious Juan de Palafox y Mendoza led the flock), Ninevah, identifying himself thus with the prophet Jonah, missionary to the pagan poor: *Predicate (ait Dominus) Evangelium omni creaturae*³.

I. The Specious Alternative: Neither Capitalist nor Socialist Ideology

In our Church, it has become common, both because it seems the easiest way and because it avoids the possibility of being confused with fanatical groups, to condemn the two ideological, economic and political extremes found in our continent: capitalism and marxist socialism. Documents such as that of the Colombian episcopate on "Christian Identity in Action for Justice" of 21 November 1976⁴, and that of the Ecuadorian episcopate, in another tone, "On the Promotion of Social Justice" of August 1977⁵, adopt as fundamental lines the condemnation of that which we could call the right and the left, in order to open the way for an intermediate position. We would like to reflect on this way of posing the question.

In the first place, and in general, these two positions, simplified a-priori and placed on a doctrinal or ideological level, are made into absolute opposites. The important thing to note is that historical analysis and concrete articulation cannot be carried out without the debate being ideological: ideology of the right, ideology of the left, or progressive centrist ideology (which is supposedly triumphant in the dialectical struggle).

Nevertheless, it is not the same to criticize the ideology which explains and justifies the dependent capitalist system in vigor in our countries as it is to criticize an ideology which posits a non-capitalist way of independent development in the future of our countries. The difference is based on the following characteristics:

1. The ideological level of a system in vigor and in control of all the instruments of the state, the economy, the culture, etc., is relatively secondary to the exercise itself of power and to the functioning of the system. Criticism of the ideology in vigor may be bothersome but, at bottom, it is secondary: it does not touch the essence of the present structure. In contrast, the ideological level of a future system without present power in the instruments of the state, the economy, etc., is essential, since it is through the proposal of a strategic, historical utopia that the criticism of all the existing unjust systems begins. Criticism of an ideology which criticizes the existing system and which proposes a future system touches the heart itself of the possibility of organizing this more just system. When the Christian criticizes the right (the ideology in vigor) and the left (the ideology of a future historical system) the significance of the criticism is not identical: in the first case, it attacks the system in vigor secondarily and partially; in the second it violently slams the door to the future. Jesus criticized the Roman Empire: "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's" (declaring himself thus a non-believer in the existing system).

On the other hand, as is well known, while he never identified with it, he never criticized the zealotism which was fighting for the historical freedom of Palestine. The zealots were taking an erroneous political path inasmuch as they did not adequately take into account the real power of the Empire, but Jesus took great care not to cut off the path of their hope. What he did was to purify it, to open the eschatological meaning of the strategic struggle; but he never condemned it.

2. More serious is the fact that when the Christian condemns a non-capitalist path of Latin American development, he remains, necessarily, caught in capitalist reformism. There is no "third way", but rather secondary positions within the first: brazen or totalitarian-militaristic capitalism, or populist capitalism such as Peronism, or developmentalist capitalism such as social democracy, or reformist capitalism in one or another way. The ideological criticism of a non-capitalist plan (as is well known in the logic of negative judgments) affirms the contrary in reality; it affirms, by exclusion, capitalism.

We would say, therefore, that criticism of capitalist and socialist ideology is not a real alternative but a specious one, because, in fact, it leaves standing the whole structure of capitalism, uncriticized except in its brazen, extreme, ideological aspect which even the Latin American commercial bourgeoisie agrees must be criticized.

2. When a Tactical Option Becomes a Strategic Theory: Reformism

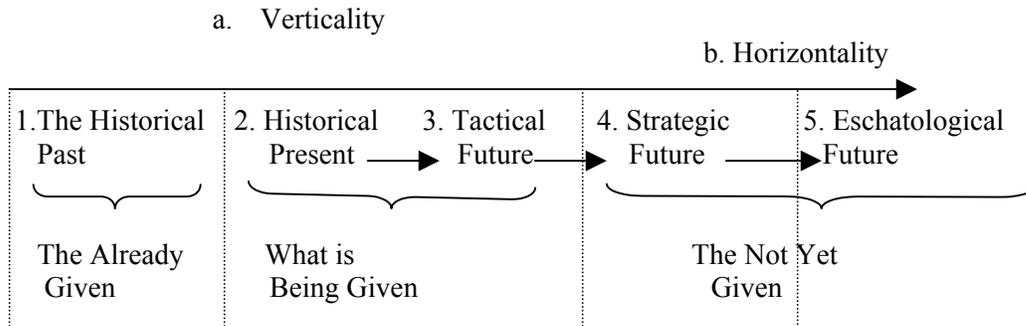
The Christian, frequently, faced with the immense power of the existing system and the responsibility of the Church to coexist with it in order to be able to carry out its mission, reasons as follows: If I attack the system head on, it will destroy me; and if it destroys me, there will be no more prophecy for there will be no more coexistent prophetic institution. In order to be able to coexist, I will not at-

tack the system head on. Moreover, since marxist socialism is the strategic enemy of

the capitalist system, if I carry out an ideological attack on socialism I will gain a greater "political space" before the system to be able to carry out a greater work of evangelization. The tactical coexistence of the Church thus becomes, surreptitiously, a strategic theory. That which began as a necessary tactic for existence (not. to attack the system head on) ends up as a strategic theoretical declaration (condemnation of the enemy of the existing system). From this moment on such a Christian can do no other than to see how the existing system can be improved in part, here and there, having closed off a strategic way out (the non-capitalist way). Thus the ideology of the third way is born, an ideology which impedes a deep-going prophetic action against the existing system and which makes the Christian an onlooker of history and a passive ally of the system which gives him more room for movement, which concedes institutional existence to the Christian because, in the end, the Christian is useful to the system as an explanation, a justification, if not downright consecration of the system.

During the Roman Empire, Christians accepted, tactically, many things: the language of the Empire, the dress, even its philosophies (insofar as these were not essentially in contradiction with Christianity), but they never confused these tactical options with strategic theories. This would have meant, for example, the condemnation of the slaves when they rebelled or consideration of the barbarians as inhuman animals when they attacked the Empire. The Christians took great care not to condemn strategically the historic enemies of the Empire, for they well knew that the eschatological hope in the final Kingdom was sheltered within the hope of a new strategic, historical system.

It is necessary to be able to distinguish very well the various levels, which are frequently confused, in order to achieve clarity. The following scheme is useful:



HISTORICAL PROCESS

There exists a certain spiritualizing conception which plays with the Hellenistic categories of above and below, vertical, horizontal. Let us remember the pharisees ("whitewashed tombs without and full uncleanness within") who, having discovered the tactical options permitting the existence of the Synagogue in the Empire, then rejected the messianism of Jesus; who criticized the publican collaborators (the right) and the zealots (the left) in order to open up a third way which they exercised in the cult of the law, in its vertical, intra-synagogue performance. The historical present is a world of sin; salvation will be obtained through a vertical tie with God (arrow a) and through the performance of numerous ahistorical intra-religious practices. History is condemned as horizontality; the strategic future is condemned beforehand as fai-

lure; the tactical future of survival becomes transformed into a reformist theory within the system. The Synagogue survives; the messianism of Jesus is too dangerous, it confuses the issue; one no longer knows who is pure and who is impure: it is better that it disappears. In agreement on this are the Empire (Pilate), the government of the country" (Herod), the official religion (the High Priests) and even the progressive spiritual groups of Israel (the Pharisees).

Once the door is closed to a unique strategic historical plan (level 4), the historical present (level 2) is defined by an escapist verticality: the third way. In reality, this is collaboration with the system: the pharisees never put the Empire into question. Christianity yes. Jesus does not propose a strategic plan (level 4) and, tactically, does not confront the Empire directly as the zealots do (level 3), but he takes care not to condemn the latter nor to consecrate the former. The eschatological Kingdom (level 5) crosses history (arrow b) not as a dualistic verticality nor as a historicist horizontality (which is consumed in the strategic or historical future: level 4), but as a process which absorbs "time" into "eternity" (and not the "below" into the "above": the metaphor of time is more adequate than the metaphor of space).

The third way, reformism, consists of the practical error based on a theoretical error which would condemn everything (right and left) without seeing the real, practical significance of such a criticism. In strategically closing off in Latin America the strategic path (level 4) to a non-capitalist way of development and national independence, one passes from a practical option on the tactical level (level 3) to the theoretical formulation (a vertical sublimation inoffensive for the existing system) of the impossibility to radically overcome the system, of the necessity to opt for reformist tasks.

3. Strategic Criticism of Existing Capitalism

The historic mission of the Christian is to realize the Kingdom of God. With Christ the Kingdom "already" exists among us; in the present this "already" is becoming in the light and dark of historical daily life. The "not yet" of everything recalls us to the necessity of work, the demands of faith in hope: evangelization. The eschatological horizon of the Kingdom (neither horizontal nor vertical but future: level 5) allows us sufficient strategic and historical (level 4) freedom not to negate the possibility of more just historical systems (although not complete, for fulfillment is only in the eschatological Kingdom beyond history). The possibility, not the inconstancy of a more just system (to demand the impossible in the words of Thomas Aquinas) is the historical pillar of support which allows a strategic or essential criticism of capitalism (not just reformist or ideological as is often the case in Church documents). Jesus made a strategic criticism of the Empire based on an eschatological judgement: "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's". The system of tribute was not divine because Caesar was not divine: after it another system is possible. The Empire well understood the strategic criticism of the system made by the Christians and because of this it not only persecuted them but tried to rob them of credibility in the eyes of the people by making them objects of bloody and grotesque mockery in the arenas. The Christians as avowed atheists of all the Roman gods and anti-fetishists of all the Roman fetishes, carried out a mortal and strategic criticism against the enslaving Empire. In so doing, without affirming as such any strategic historical plan, they opened the breach for the formulation of a new plan and ultimately for a new, more human system: tributary feudalism of me-

dieval Europe (which would, in turn, be criticized anew by Christians, so that men such as the Franciscans were the "intellectuals" who supported the nascent European monarchies at the height of the Middle Ages).

This is why in Medellin there is only condemnation of the capitalist system in vigor. There is criticism of dependency, of the international imperialism of money, of oligarchies, etc. In Medellin a non-capitalist plan of Latin American development is neither affirmed nor rejected. Is this silence a lack or is it a position? Was the silence of Jesus in regard to the zealots forgetfulness or a tactical option?

Because the system in which we live today, in the historical present, is one of hunger, of the exploitation of our people, of marginalized classes, we must criticize the capitalism hegemonized by the United States and Western Europe, Christian nations according to their public declarations, their history and their cult. However, the criticism must not be ideological but concretely spelled out. It must take into account the repressive state apparatus, not only under the ideology of national security, but in the effective elimination of all democracy, of all criticism, of all freedom of thought, etc.; of its economic exploitation of the salary of our workers, of the exportation of capital, the concentration of capital in the hands of a few (for the greater part the North American, German or Japanese transnationals), etc. This is not the place to make such an analysis; however, if a concrete criticism is not made, it is better to make no criticism at all.

4. A Final Case: Tactical Silence in the Face of Possible Strategic Exits

If the Church thinks that its eschatological mission prevents it or tells it, tactically, not to propose any strategic plan (Le., if on the basis of level 5, for reasons of level 3, nothing is proposed for level 4), this is not the same as condemning or rejecting a strategic non-capitalist plan. Silence, as that of Christ in regard to the zealots, is full of significance; it is as the maternal breast which nourishes in darkness and silence the child of the future (the blood of the martyrs built not only the Celestial Jerusalem but medieval Europe as well). Not shutting the door to a non-capitalist plan has the greatest historical importance. This alternative is a new alternative; it is not a third way, not reformist, not accommodating. .

The enormous difference between the non-condemnation of a non-capitalist plan (and consequently the non-condemnation of the Christians who, under their own responsibility before the Lord, opt for this) and the ideological condemnation of capitalism and socialism is that the latter, the third way, in appearance very independent and progressive, gives strategic support to capitalism and, at bottom, tries to improve the system with its partial reforms. In contrast, the former, in not condemning a non-capitalist way out, preserves itself as a seat of judgment in the face of the capitalism in vigor; as the Judgment Seat of God in history which criticizes the Beast which holds power because it has obtained it from the Dragon, but "only for a time", at the end of which the existing empire of clay will be broken. The Church, loyal to the poor, oppressed by the Beast, does not close the door to the future, neither does it adjust itself in a collaborationist manner to cleanse or reform the heart of the idol, gold and iron above but with feet of clay. In this as in everything, Jesus teaches us the difficult way. He did not condemn zealotism; he was not a zealot; he purified their plan: he invited some of its devotees to become his apostles. In contrast, he greatly criticized Herod, the priesthood, the pharisees, the lukewarm, the reformist third way.

5. *Tactics. Strategy. Eschatology*

The basic intention of this brief reflection is to point out that, in the historical process of the Church, very clear distinctions can be made between tactical, strategic and eschatological options and their respective theories. A practical option is not the same as a theory, which pretends to have a universal validity; an opportune decision is not the same as a theoretical proposal which goes beyond the specific occasion.

There are practical, tactical, strategic and eschatological errors. It is well known that all levels must be adequate. An error on one level will throw everything off. An error of tactical estimation means that the strategic and even the eschatological judgments will be in error. Thus, for example, the third way, in pretending to make a universally valid theoretical or ideological criticism of capitalism and socialism, may play a practical role in the affirmation of capitalism. Let us look at another chart:

	Tactical Level	Strategic Level	Eschatological Level
Practical Option	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	C
Universal Theory	0	E	F

The third way's ideological criticism of capitalism and socialism is situated on level E, but has repercussions on levels A and B as a support of capitalism. In reality, it arises from a tactical option: the survival of the institution. The passage from A to E (from the tactical option to the strategic theory) is, to be exact, the reformist third way.

On the contrary, silence on the level of support or condemnation on level E (non-condemnation of a non-capitalist way) allows an openness to its possibility, gives greater tactical freedom on the practical (A) and theoretical (0) levels; it does not shut off the possibility of a criticism from the eschatological levels (C and F) of the capitalist system in vigor in Latin America (the plan of which is formulated on level B and E).

The spirit of Medellin, like that of the Second Vatican Council, was not a spirit of condemnation. It was a constructive and prophetic spirit. Insofar as it was prophetic, it condemned the existing sinfulness, the present system which is oppressing Latin America, centralized capitalism on which we are dependent. Insofar as it was constructive, it affirmed the pastoral work of the grassroots which allowed the Church to give a witness in defending the rights of the poor on a tactical level, opening strategically at the same time, slowly but surely, a breach through which a system beyond capitalism could permit those people who today are oppressed to live with greater justice in Latin America.

The final recommendation to the church of Laodicea is: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches". (Apocalypse 3:22). With Julian Garcés, defender of the *indios* and great apologist of their personal dignity, let it be that the Latin American Church speaks in Puebla a language which looks towards the future, with hope, condemning the practical, existing sinfulness and not one which criticizes capitalism ideologically; may our Church be neither one of the third way nor reformist, may it not be lukewarm in the love of Jesus and of his poor people who are hungry.

NOTES:

1. Gonzalez Dávila, *Teatro eclesiástico*. I, p. 32.
- 2 See this letter in my work *El episcopado latinoamericano institución misionera in defensa del indios*, CIDOC, Cuernavaca, volume IX, 1971, Document 47, pp. 147ff., and references to Bishop Garcés in *ibid.* volume V, 1970, pp, 62ff.
- 3 From the famous letter, IV, *op. cit.*, volume IX, p. 151.
- 4 In this document, ample consideration is given to the concept of the poor which ends up by obscuring its outlines: "The poor, for the Church, are also those who, although they are affluent in the economic or social order..." (nr. 116).
5. See, for example, nr. 5, in which they condemn both the position of those who "depreciate the social implications of evangelization" as well as those on the opposite side who take on «a commitment with historical, liberating and revolutionary praxis". The document goes on: "These contradictory currents..."

(Translated from the Spanish)