

Catholic Ethics and that the Spirit of Capitalism

Michael Löwy



Text available at www.iea.usp.br/english/articles

The opinions here expressed are responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs of IEA/USP.

Catholic Ethics and that the Spirit of Capitalism

The Unwritten Chapter in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion

Michael Löwy

The main argument of Max Weber's **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism** is not so much (as is often said) that religion is the determinant causal factor of economic development, but rather that there exists, between certain religious forms and the capitalist lifestyle a relationship of **elective affinity** (*Wahlverwandtschaft*). Weber does not define what he means by this term, but one can deduce from his writings that it designates a relationship of mutual attraction and mutual reinforcement, leading, in certain cases, to a sort of cultural symbiosis.¹

What about the economic significance of **Catholic** ethics? Max Weber never wrote a systematic assessment of the relations between Catholicism and the capitalist **ethos**, but there is an obvious "undertext", an unwritten counterargument built into the structure itself of **The Protestant Ethic**: the Catholic Church is a much less favorable - if not outright hostile - environment for the development of capitalism than the Calvinist and Methodist sects. Why is it so? In fact, there are some insights, both in this book and in some of his other works, who constitute a sort of (partial) answer to this question. Although these arguments are dispersed in different writings and have never been developed or systematized by Weber, they give us some very precious clues to understand the tension between Catholicism and capitalism. Curiously enough, there is - as far as I know - practically no substantial treatment of this issue in the immense their literature around the Weberian thesis published in the last 80 years. Let us try to reconstruct this unwritten Weberian essay, by using all his references to this tension, and then verify his hypothesis in the light of some other historical or religious sources.

Paradoxically, **The Protestant Ethic** is one of Weber's writings that has less to say about this issue. Although the first chapter deals extensively on the differences in economic development between the predominantly Catholic and Protestant areas in Germany, there is little attempt to examine the barriers for capitalist growth imposed by the Catholic culture. He limits himself to mention "St. Thomas characterization of the desire for gain as **turpitude** (which term even included the unavoidable and hence

¹ For a detailed discussion of this concept and its methodological usefulness for the sociology of culture, I refer the reader to my book **Redemption and Utopia. Libertarian Judaism in Central Europe**, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993.

ethically justified profit-making)". In a more explicit passage, he argues in the Catholic tradition

the feeling was never quite overcome, that activity directed to acquisition for its own sake was at bottom a **pudendum** which was to be tolerated only because of the unalterable necessities of life in this world...The dominant doctrine rejected the spirit of capitalist acquisition as **turpitudō**, or at least could not give it a positive ethical sanction.²

In the debate that followed the publication of the book, Weber suggested a new idea: the **incompatibility** (*Unvereinbarkeit*) between the ideals of the serious Catholic believer and the "commercial" struggle for acquisition; but does not mention any ethical or religious motives for this opposition.³

It is only several years later, in the *Zwischenbetrachtung* (1915-16), that we find some - very interesting - explanatory hypothesis. At first Weber does not deal specifically with Catholicism but with the general tension between the soteriological ethics of fraternity and the values of the world: an **irreconcilable split** (*unversöhlicher zwiespalt*) that is nowhere so visible as in the **economic** sphere, where the sublimated redemptive religiosity clashes with the rationalized economy, based on money, the market, competition, as well as abstract and impersonal calculation:

The more the cosmos of the modern rational capitalist economy follows its own immanent inner laws, the less it is accessible to any imaginable relation to a religious ethics of fraternity. (...) Formal and substantive rationality stay here in a mutual conflict.

Interestingly enough, Weber does not present the religious ethics as irrational in opposition to the rational economic (capitalist) system, but describes both as two different sorts of rationality, in terms ("formal and substantive") that are not too far from those that will be later used by the Frankfurt School ("instrumental and substantive").

² Max Weber, **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**, London, Unwin, 1967, pp. 73-74.

³ Max Weber, **Die protestantische Ethik II. Kritiken und Antikritiken**, Gütersloh, GTB, 1972, p.168.

The main example - mentioned in the *Zwischenbetrachtung* - of such religious mistrust against the rise of impersonal economic forces, necessarily hostile to the ethics of fraternity (*brüderlichkeitsfeindliche ökonomischen Mächte*), is the **Catholic Church**: "The Catholic 'Deo placere non potest' was durably characteristic of its attitude towards the economic life". Of course, the Church was forced, by its own dependence on economic activities, to compromise, as one can see for instance in the history of the ban on loan-interest (*Zinsverbot*). However, "in last instance, the tension itself could hardly be overcome".⁴

The issue is once more taken up - and the analysis deepened - in **Economy and Society**. This time Weber directly discusses the relation between Catholic ethics and capitalism. Referring to the long and obstinate fight of the Catholic Church against interest rates, he speaks of a "principled struggle between the ethical and the economical rationalization of the economy", whose motivations he describes as follows:

Above all, it is the **impersonal**, economically rational, but because of it, ethically irrational character of pure business (*geschäftlicher*) relationships as such, that gives rise, precisely among ethical religions, to such a feeling of mistrust, which is never clearly made explicit, but the more so deeply felt. Each purely personal relation of human being to human being, whatever it may be, including the most complete slavery, can be ethically regulated, and ethical norms can be posited, since its structure depends on the individual will of the participants, and therefore there is room for the deployment of charitable virtues. Not so, however, with rational business relations, and the less so, the more they are rationally differentiated. (...) The reification (*Versachlichung*) of the economy on the basis of the socialization by the market follows entirely its own objectified (*sachlichen*) laws. (...) The reified universe (*versachlichte Kosmos*) of Capitalism offers finally no room for any charitable orientation. (...) Therefore, in a characteristic ambiguity, the clergy has always supported - also in the interest of traditionalism - patriarchalism against impersonal relations of

⁴ Max Weber, *Zwischenbetrachtung*, in *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus*, Tübingen, JCB Mohr, 1989, pp. 487-488. My translation ML.

dependence, although, on the other side, prophecy breaks down patriarchal links.⁵

This is an extremely insightful analysis, which helps us to understand both the opposition of Latin American progressive Catholics to the cold and impersonal nature of capitalist relations, and their struggle, in the name of prophetic justice, against traditional patriarchal domination over peasant communities. While taking, as we shall see, an entirely new form, this movement has deep roots in that double (or "ambiguous") Catholic tradition.

Weber strongly emphasizes the moral hostility of the Church towards the abstract and reified logic of the capitalist system in his **Economic History**. Referring the paradox that capitalism emerged in the West, i.e. in a part of the world where the dominant ideology had "an economic theory entirely hostile to capital" (*durchhaus kapitalfeindliche Wirtschaftstheorie*) he added the following commentary:

The ethos of the Church's economic ethics is summarized in judgment, probably taken up from Arianism, about the merchant: *homo mercator vix aut numquam potest Deo placere* (...) The deep aversion (*Abneigung*) of the Catholic and following it the Lutheran ethics against any capitalist initiative is essentially grounded on the fear from the impersonal nature of relations inside capitalist economy. This impersonality is the reason why certain human relations are teared away from the Church and its influence, and why it becomes impossible for her to ethically penetrate or shape them.⁶

⁵ M. Weber, **Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft**, Tübingen, J.C.B.Mohr, 1923, p. 305. (my translation ML). The Latin quota says: "The merchant can triumph but he can never please God". In another chapter of the book Weber speaks of the "deepest antipathy" of all hierocratic religions (including Catholicism) against capitalism, motivated by the impossibility of any ethical control of the system: "In opposition to all other forms of domination, the economic domination of capital cannot, because of its 'impersonal character', be ethically regulated... The competitiveness, the market, the labor market, the monetary market, the commodity market, in one word 'objective'" considerations, neither ethical nor anti-ethical, but simply un-ethical... determine behavior at the decisive points and push between the involved human beings impersonal instances". **Ibid.** pp. 708-709 (my translation ML).

⁶ M. Weber, **Wirtschaftsgeschichte**, München, Dunker + Humboldt, 1923, p. 305. My translation ML.

One of the consequences this "deep gap between the economic inevitable requirements and the Christian ideal of life" was the "ethical downgrading" of the rational economic spirit.⁷ It is to be noted that Weber associates in a common opposition to the capitalist **ethos** both the Catholic and the Lutheran ethics - a somewhat different approach than in **The Protestant Ethic**, although in this earlier work a distinction is already made between the Lutheran and the Calvinist or Methodist forms of Protestantism, considered the most favorable for the development of capitalist accumulation.

In any case, Weber hints at the existence of an essential and irreconcilable aversion or rejection, by the Catholic Church (and probably also some Protestant denominations), of the spirit of capitalism. One could speak of a sort of cultural **antipathy** - in the old, alchemical, meaning of the word: "lack of affinity between two substances". In other terms, we have here an exact inversion of the **elective affinity** (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) between (some forms of) the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism: there would exist, between the Catholic ethic and capitalism a sort of **negative affinity** - using this term in a similar way as Weber when he speaks of the "negative privileges" of pariah communities.

As Weber himself hints, this does not prevent a "realistic" accommodation and adaptation of the Catholic institutions to the capitalist system, particularly as it grows increasingly powerful; the Church's criticism is usually directed against the excesses of Liberalism rather than against the foundations of capitalism. Moreover, confronted with a much greater danger - the socialist labor movement - the Church did not hesitate to join forces with bourgeois and capitalist forces against this common enemy. In general it can be said that the Church never thought it possible or desirable to abolish capitalism: its aim was always to correct its most negative aspects by the charitable and 'social' action of Christianity. But there remains, deeply ingrained in the Catholic culture, sometimes hidden, sometimes manifest, the ethical aversion, the "negative affinity" with capitalism.

How far does historical investigation confirm or not this - rather implicit - Weberian hypothesis? It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the issue at any length. Let us only mention a few important studies that seem to support this contention. For instance, the evidence provided by Bernard Groethuysen, in his well known work on the origins of bourgeois society in France (**The bourgeois. Catholicism vs. Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France**) strongly highlights the opposition of the Church to the rise of Capitalism. Drawing extensively on the writings of Catholic

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 306.

theologians of the XVII and XVIIIth centuries, like Father Thomassin's **Traité du Négoce et de l'Usure** (1697) or Bayle's well known **Dictionnaire historique et critique** (1695), he points to their systematic anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois bias:

Thus a whole class of society was the target. It was not the newly rich or the rich in general (...) that the ministers of God attacked; it was the big industrialists, the big bankers, the merchant contractors, to whom they pointed by name. (...) They were all classed as 'capitalists' and 'usurers', as men who deliberately ignored the commandment of God.

It should be stressed, however, that unlike Weber's supposition, it is not so much the impersonality of the new economic system than its injustice that motivates most of the moral outrage (although the two are not necessarily contradictory), like in this typical passage from Prigent's **Observations sur le Prêt à Interêt dans le Commerce** (1783):

Industry's capital is multiplied, but for whose benefit? For that of the artisans who give of their labor? Most of them have only work, poverty and abasement as their lot. The funds which are accumulated are poured into the coffers of a small number of businessmen, fattened on the sweat of a host of workers who wear themselves out in dismal manufacture.⁸

Groethuysen's research and the work of several other historians, points to a source of Catholic anticapitalism that Weber seemed to neglect: the ethical and religious identification of Christ with the poor (inspired by Matthews 25, 31). During centuries, Catholic theology and popular tradition saw the poor as the earthly image of Christ sufferings. As the theologian A. Bonnefous wrote in his book **Le chrestien charitable**, from 1637, "the poor than one helps is perhaps Jesus Christ himself".⁹ Of course, this

⁸ See Bernard Groethuysen, **The Bourgeois. Catholicism vs. Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France**, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 19??, pp. 192-193, 217. Groethuysen begins his study with the XVIIth century, but there are enough other works that refer to earlier periods. According to J. Strieder, there existed in the XVIth century widespread expressions of a passionate Catholic opposition to the early forms of the capitalist spirit (früh kapitalistischen Geist). See his book **Studien zur Geschichte kapitalistischen Organisationsformen**, Münnich, 1925, p. 63.

⁹ See Jean-Pierre Gutton, **La société et les pauvres. L'exemple de la généralité de Lyon 1534-1789**, Paris,

attitude led mainly to a charitable attention to the poor, without necessarily rejecting the existing economic system. However, it also nourished, during the whole history of the Church, rebel movements and doctrines that challenged social injustice in the name of the poor, and, in modern times, denounced capitalism as the root of the evil and the cause of impoverishment. This is particularly true of Liberation Theology in Latin America, as we shall see.

A similar analysis as Groethuysen's is presented, for the XIXth and early XXth century, by Emile Poulat, in his book **The Church against the bourgeoisie. An introduction to the origins of present social Catholicism**. Using mainly Italian sources, Poulat describes a broad European tendency that he calls intransigent Catholicism, whose influence explains the persistent opposition of the Church to the modern bourgeois civilization. Although intransigent Catholicism is also radically hostile to socialism, "both declare themselves to be incompatible with the spirit of liberalism that pervades bourgeois society and the capitalist economy". Voices pleading, like the French Catholic author Emile de Laveleye in 1888 for "an alliance of Catholicism and socialism against the liberal bourgeoisie, their common enemy", were quite isolated.¹⁰

There have not been equivalent studies on the history of Latin American Catholicism, but recently, in a brilliant essay on the Catholic baroque ethos of the Hispanic-American culture of the XVII and XVIIIth century, the Mexican scholar Bolivar Echevarria argued that this was a historical world "connected to the attempt by the Catholic Church to build a religious form of modernity, based on the re-vitalization of faith - as an alternative to the abstract individualistic modernity, which was grounded on the vitality of capital..."¹¹

Modern catholic thinkers have used both Weber's (for the Protestant aspect) and Groethuysen's works to argue that "the Catholic **ethos** is anti-capitalistic". This statement appears in Amintore Fanfani's book from 1935, **Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism**. Following Weber, the author - at that time a young Catholic intellectual, later to become a leader of the Demo-Christian Party and Italy's prime minister - defines capitalism as a system of economic rationalization that is impermeable to exterior influences. The following conclusion results from this premise:

"Les Bailes Lettres", 1971.

¹⁰ Emile Poulat, **Eglise contre bourgeoisie. Introduction au devenir du catholicisme social actuel**, Paris, Castermann, 1977. The quote from Laveleye's book **Le socialisme contemporain** (Paris, Alcan, 1888, p. 167) can be found in Emile Poulat, **Journal d'un prêtre d'après demain**, Paris, Castermann, 1961, p. 187.

¹¹ Bolivar Echeverria, "El ethos barroco", **Nariz del diablo**, Quito (Ecuador), n° 20, p. 40.

To discover a principle on which to base criticism of a system like capitalism within that system is impossible. Criticism can only come from another order of ideas, from a system that would direct social activity towards non-capitalistic aims. This Catholicism does when its social ethics demand that ends must converge to a definitely non-capitalistic direction.

Moreover,

in an age in which the Catholic conception of life had a real hold over the mind, capitalist action could only have manifested itself as something erroneous, reprehensible, spasmodic, and sinful, to be condemned by the faith and knowledge of the agent himself. (...) The anti-capitalistic action of the Church, which was very intensive in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was still, as Groethuysen has pointed out, in full force in eighteenth century...¹²

According to Fanfani, while Protestantism favored the dominant of the capitalist spirit, or rather, legitimized it and sanctified it - Weber's thesis reviewed and corrected by Robertson - "there is an unbridgeable gulf between the Catholic and the capitalist conception of life". In order to understand this difference, one has to take into consideration the fact that, unlike the Protestant ethic, "in their general lines, Catholic social ethics are always antithetical to capitalism". As a result of this contradiction, Catholicism shows a "most decided repugnance" towards Capitalism - not against this or that aspect (nearly all such aspects being accidental) but against the essence itself of the system.¹³

Of course, not all Catholic intellectual shared such a radical viewpoint. And the author himself, Amintore Fanfani, was to become a typical manager of the capitalist economy, as Italy's prime minister after the war. However, the book became, according to

¹² Amintore Fanfani, **Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism** (1935), Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

¹³ A. Fanfani, Op.cit.pp. 142-151, 208.

a new preface, written in 1984 by Michael Novak, "a locus classicus of anti-capitalist sentiment among Catholic intellectuals".

Michael Novak, the well known US religious neo-conservative, is a good example of procapitalist Catholic thinking. However, his innumerable complaints against what he calls "the Catholic anti-capitalist bias", his open dissatisfaction with what he considers to be a serious short-coming of his own religious tradition, are another piece of evidence, albeit involuntary, for the existence of a sort of **negative affinity**, or '**cultural antipathy**', between the Catholic ethics and the spirit of Capitalism. According to Novak, a book like Fanfani's

helps to explain why Catholic nations were long retarded in encouraging development, invention, savings, investment, entrepreneurship, and, in general, economic dynamism. In the name of Catholic ideals it is blind to its own prejudices. It fails to state correctly the capitalist ideal. It fails also to see some of the faults and the underdeveloped parts in Catholic social thought.¹⁴

Similar criticism of "the Catholic anti-capitalist tradition", and of the Catholic "bias against democratic capitalism", can also be found in Novak's main works, like the much celebrated apologetic piece, **The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism** (1982). According to the author, Catholic attitudes toward money were "based on pre-modern realities" and Catholic thought "did not understand the creativity and productivity of wisely invested capital"; fascinated with distributive ethics, it has "misread the liberal democratic capitalist revolution", particularly in Great Britain and the US.¹⁵

Novack accused the Catholic Church of being too conservative. It is true that this Catholic anticapitalist bias, this hostility against modern bourgeois society has had, since its origin, an overwhelmingly conservative, restorative, regressive, in a word, **reactionary** tendency. It clearly expressed the Church's nostalgia for the feudal/corporative past, for a pre-capitalist hierarchical society where it had outstanding power and privileges. It very often took the sinister form of **anti-Semitism**, the Jew serving as a scapegoat for the evils of usury, the dissolving power of money and the rise of capitalism. However, next to this dominant orientation - and in a more or less conflictual relation to it - there existed also a

¹⁴ Michael Novak, "Introduction. The catholic anti-capitalist bias", in A. Fanfani, Op.cit., p.XLVIII.

¹⁵ Michael Novak, **The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism**, New York, Touchstone, 1982, pp. 25, 239, 242.

different Catholic sensibility, whose main motivation was the sympathy with the plight of the poor, and who were, to some extent at least, attracted by the socialist or communist utopias. Of course, both dimensions are not always contradictory, and between the opposite poles of progressive utopia and regressive restoration, there exists a whole spectrum of ambiguous, ambivalent or intermediary positions. Although Weber was mainly interested in the (mostly negative) consequences of Catholic ethics for the rise and growth of a modern industrial economy, one can easily show that the same sort of religious anti-capitalism inspired also the active commitment of Catholics to the social emancipation of the poor.

The first modern example of such an utopian sort of Catholicism is Thomas More, who not only dreamt of a sort of "communist" system (quite authoritarian, by the way) but also denounced one of the key aspects of what Marx defined as the primitive accumulation of capital in the XVIth century: the enclosures that expelled the poor peasants from their land and replaced them by sheep ("sheep, which are normally so gentle... have begun to be so ravenous and wild that they even eat up men"). Condemning the "pernicious pests" that stripped the tenants from their lands by trickery or violence, and the "wicked greed of a few", Thomas More lamented the "wretched poverty" of most the English people and called for a new economic policy: "Check the rich from buying everything up and put an end to their freedom of monopoly".¹⁶

We cannot follow here the evolution of the conservative and the utopian currents in Catholic (or Protestant) anti-capitalism throughout the centuries. Let us just recall that, at the beginning of the XIXth century, we can find a strange combination of both in what Marx ironically called feudal or Christian socialism:

half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history.¹⁷

¹⁶ Thomas More, **Utopia**, New York, Washington Square Press, 1965, pp. 14-16.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, in *Revolution of 1848*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973, p. 88.

He was perhaps referring to authors like the romantic Catholic social philosopher Johannes von Baader, a staunch partisan of Church and King, that denounced the miserable condition of the **proletaires** (his term) in England and France as more cruel and inhuman than serfdom. Criticizing the brutal and un-Christian exploitation of this propertyless class by the moneyed interests (*Argyrokratie*), he suggested that the Catholic clergy should become the advocate and representative of the **proletaires**...¹⁸

Johannes von Baader is quite representative of a distinctive Catholic form of the **romantic** culture. Romanticism is much more than a literary school: it constitutes a world-view that embraces all spheres of culture. One could define it as a protest against modern capitalist/industrial civilization in the name of pre-capitalist values, a nostalgic *Weltanschauung* opposed to certain key components of this civilization: disenchantment of the world, quantification of values, mechanization, dissolution of community, abstract rationality. Since the late XVIII century (Rousseau) until our days it has been one of the main structures- of- sensibility in modern culture, under various forms, ranging from utter conservatism to revolutionary utopianism. While at the early XIX century Catholic thinkers usually belonged to the traditionalist and reactionary part of the romantic spectrum (with some exceptions, such as the famous abbot Lammennais), this began to change at the beginning of the XX century, with the emergence of a small current of Catholic socialism.¹⁹

When writing his **Magic Mountain** shortly after World War I, Thomas Mann represented Catholic romantic culture, with all its ambiguities, in the strange figure of 'Leon Naphta', a revolutionary Jesuit, a fervent partisan of the medieval Church and at the same time an apocalyptic prophet of world communism.

There is much of Thomas Mann himself in Leon Naphta, but by making him a Jesuit of Jewish origin he was perhaps taking his inspiration from some Jewish-German romantic revolutionaries, fascinated by the medieval Catholic culture. Among this sort of **gothic socialists** one could include Georg Lukacs (which is often presented as the model for the Naphta figure), Gustav Landauer and Ernst Bloch. For all of them the attraction for

¹⁸ Johannes von Baader, "Ober das dermalige Missverhältnis der Vermöglosen oder Proletais zu den Vermögen besitzenden Klassen der Sozietgt in betreff ihres Auskommens sowohl in materieller als intellektueller Hinsicht aus dem Standpunkte das Rechts betrachtet". (18351,m in **Sätze zur Erotische Philosophie**, hersg. von G.K. Kaltenhrunner, Frankfurt, Insel Verlag, 1991, pp. 181.182, 186. We are not dealing here with the numerous "Christian communists" of the early 19th century (Cabet, Weitling, Kriege) because they had few links to Catholicism or the Church. The best reference in this area is Henri Desroche, **Socialismes et sociologie religieuse**, Paris, Cujas, 1965.

¹⁹ See on this our book (with Robert Sayre) **Révolte et Mélancolie. Le romantisme à contre-courant de la modernité**, Paris, Payot, 1992.

the gothic culture is intimately related to their romantic aversion for the modern capitalist/industrial civilization. Interestingly enough, several of these utopian authors used Max Weber's work to denounce Protestantism and celebrate medieval Catholic civilization - quite against the intentions of the author of **The Protestant Ethic**. Ernst Bloch, for instance, insisted, in his *Thomas Münzer, theologian of revolution* (1921), on the role of Calvinist innerworldly asceticism in the accumulation of capital. Thanks to the Protestant ethic,

as Max Weber has brilliantly shown, the emerging capitalist economy was entirely liberated, detached and emancipated from all the scruples of primitive Christianity, as well as from all what remained relatively Christian in the ideology of the Middle Ages.²⁰

Paradoxically, the upsurge of a Catholic left seems to be related with the Church's increasing willingness to compromise with the bourgeois society. After its bitter condemnation of liberal principles and modern society in the **Syllabus** (1864) Rome seemed to accept, by the end of the XIXth century, the advent of capitalism and of the modern ("liberal") bourgeois state as irreversible facts. The most visible manifestation of this new strategy is the "rallying" of the French Church (until then an outspoken supporter of Monarchy) to the French Republic. Intransigent Catholicism takes the form of "social Catholicism", who, while still criticizing the excesses of "liberal capitalism", does not really challenge the existing social and economical order. This applies to all documents of the so-called Roman magistracy (the papal encyclicas) as well as to the Social Doctrine of the Church, from **Rerum Novarum** (1891) to our days.

It is precisely at the moment of the Church's - real or apparent - "reconciliation" with the modern world that emerges a new form of **Catholic socialism**, mainly in France, that will become a significant - although minoritarian - factor in French catholic culture. At the turn of the century one sees the simultaneous upsurge of the most reactionary forms of Catholic anti-capitalism - Charles Maurras, the **Action Française** movement and the

²⁰ Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972, pp. 118.119. In a similar vein, Erich Fromm, in an essay from the 30's, referred himself to Sombart and Weber to denounce the role of Calvinism in the establishment of the professional duty, of the acquisition of commodities and of saving as dominant bourgeois ethical norms - instead of the inborn right to happiness acknowledged by the pre-capitalist societies (like the medieval Catholic culture). See Erich Fromm, "Die psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialpsychologie", *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1932, in: E.Fromm, *Gesamtausgabe*, Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 1980,1, pp. 59.77.

regressive wing of the Church, all active in the ugly anti-Semitic campaign against Dreyfus - and of an equally "intransigent" but now leftist form of anti-capitalism, whose first representative is the philo-semitic Dreyfusard leader and socialist writer, converted to Catholicism (although he never joined the Church) in 1907, Charles Peguy. This current is not without its ambiguities (in relation to "revolutionary conservatism"), but its basic commitment is to the left.

Few socialist authors have developed a more thorough, radical and vitriolic critique of modern bourgeois society, the spirit of capitalist accumulation, and the impersonal logic of money than Charles Peguy. He is the founder of a specifically French tradition of progressive Christian anticapitalism (mainly Catholic, but occasionally ecumenical), which unfolds during the XX century, including such diverse figures as: Emmanuel Mounier and his group (the journal **Esprit**), the (small) movement of **Revolutionary Christians** at the time of the Popular Front, the anti-fascist Resistance network '**Témoignage Chrétien**' during World War II, the **Workers Priests** during the 40's and the 50's, the various Christian movements and networks that concurred to the foundation, in the late 50's, of the left-socialist P.S.U. (**Parti Socialiste Unifié**), the majority current of the Christian Confederation of Labor (CFTC) that became socialist and transformed itself into the **Democratic Confederation of Labor** (CFDT), as well a large part of the **Catholic Youth** - students (JEC, JUC) or workers (JOC) - that actively sympathized, in the 60's and 70's, with various socialist, communist or revolutionary movements. To this wide spectrum one has also to add a great amount of religious (particularly Dominican) authors and theologians that have shown, after the Second World War, a great interest for Marxism and socialism: Henri Desroche, Jean-Yves Calvez, M.D. Chenu, Jean Cardonnel, Paul Blanquart, and many others.

The most influent of this figures was probably Emmanuel Mounier: following on the footsteps of Charles Péguy (on whose legacy he wrote one of his first books), he impressed his readers by his passionate critique of capitalism as a system grounded on the "imperialism of money", the anonymity of the market (we find here the element emphasized by Weber) and the negation of human personality; an ethical and religious aversion that leads him to propose an alternative forro of society, "personnalist socialism", which has, in his own terms, "enormously to learn from Marxism".²¹

²¹ Emmanuel Mounier, *Feu la chretientó*, Seuil, Paris, 1950, p. 52. During the 30's, Mounier seemed both fascinated and terrified by some so-called "leftist" tendencies in fascism, and his attitude to Vichy's "national revolution" in 1940 was quite ambiguous. Soon afterwards he will join the Resistance and after the war he

Although Christian socialists linked to the Catholic Church can be found elsewhere, there is (outside Latin America) no other such broad and extended religious leftist anti-capitalist tradition as in the French catholic culture. To examine the reasons for this particularity is beyond the scope of these pages. But it is not an accident that the first manifestation of **a progressive Christianity** in Latin America, the so-called Brazilian Christian Left of 1960-62 - whose main actor is the Catholic Student Union (JUC) - was directly linked to this French culture. To mention just one example, according to the Jesuit Henrique Lima Vaz, advisor to the JUC, at the beginning of the 60's, Emmanuel Mounier was "the most influential master of the Brazilian catholic youth".²²

Latin American's "Church of the Poor" is the inheritor of the **ethical rejection of capitalism** by Catholicism - the '**negative affinity**' - and especially of this French and European tradition of Christian socialism. When, at a meeting in 1968, the Brazilian JOC (Workers' Catholic Youth) approved a resolution stating that "capitalism is intrinsically evil, because it prevents the integral development of human beings and the solidary development of the people", it gave a most radical and striking expression to this tradition. At the same time, by ironically reversing the well known formula of Papal excommunication of communism as an "intrinsically perverse system", it dissociates itself from the conservative ("reactionary") aspect of the Church's official doctrine.²³

In a similar way Herbert José de Souza, one of the main leaders of the Brazilian JUC, pays homage, in an article from 1962 to the (official) Catholic anti-capitalist ethos:

We don't say anything new. We repeat, with all the Popes, the condemnation of capitalism, the need for a more just and human structure, were the social propriety takes the place of the private property of the liberal structure. ...). It is not an accident that all the official documents of the Church condemn capitalism: it is a system that establishes, by principle, the inequality of opportunities.²⁴

becomes increasingly attracted by Marxism.

²² H. de Lima Vaz, "La jeunesse brésilienne à l'heure des décisions", Perspectives de catholicité, n° 4, 1963, p. 288.

²³ Resolutions of the JOC and ACO (Workers Catholic Action) Congress, Recife, June 15, 1968, quoted by Marcio Moreira Alves, **L'Eglise et la politique au Brésil**, Paris, Cerf, 1974, p. 153.

²⁴ Herbert José de Souza, "Juventude cristã hoje", in **Cristianismo hoje**, Rio, Editora Universitária da UNE, 1962, pp. 110, 112.

This sort of statement should not be taken too literally: in fact, Latin American Liberationist Christianity is not just a continuation of the Church's traditional anticapitalism, or of its French Catholic/leftist variant. It is essentially the creation of a **new religious culture**, expressing the specific conditions of Latin America: dependent capitalism, massive poverty, institutionalized violence, popular religiosity.