

INTRODUCTION

In traditional theology there is a discipline called "social ethics." The present volume will take up questions handled in that discipline. But it will do so from the viewpoint of the theology of liberation.

I do not pretend, in this brief work, to furnish the reader with a full-blown *exposition* or *explanation* of these questions. I intend only to *situate* them. That is, I shall show the place they occupy in the theology of liberation.

I do not think that it would have been helpful to distract the reader with bibliographical information in the text that would be of interest only to those who will wish to study a problem in greater depth. Hence I shall not use footnotes. I do, however, append a basic bibliography.

I have divided this work into two parts. Part 1 will pose the *basic questions* of community ethics—those constituting the point of departure for an understanding of all other problems. The order of these basic questions: from the simpler and more important to the complex and more derivative.

In Part 2 I shall present ten *quaestiones disputatae* of current interest, problems that must be elucidated if Christian praxis is to be faithful to the demands of the gospel in the present hour of history. The reader must understand that these discussions represent but a small sampling of the long list of questions that I might have taken up. Indeed, it would be well for the person in charge of a study group, or participants themselves in the course of a lecture series, to suggest other problems, thereby lending further realism to the theologico-ethical reflection of this course.

The purpose of the Subject Index is to clarify the interrelationship of the various topics considered here, with a view to enhancing the usefulness of this book for church communities, preachers, and students of theology.

Before beginning each chapter, readers should reflect on a clipping from the daily newspaper, to be selected by the coordinator or the participants. Any article referring in any way to the question

under consideration will do. (For an example, see the opening of chapter 3.) After all, theology is a reflection on daily, current, concretely Christian praxis. Hence the person in charge of the community, the teacher or instructor, the coordinator, or for that matter the participants of a training or study group themselves, should choose some material from the most recent issue of the morning or evening newspaper published in the particular locale, city, or region where teachers and learners meet.

I run many risks. I try to be simple and clear, but I also wish to be scientific. I try to be understandable, but I wish to be profound as well. I try to take a sound pedagogical approach, but at the same time I want to be realistic. I shall proceed, with Thomas Aquinas in his *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics* (see his introduction), "from the simple to the complex"-that is, "from the abstract to the concrete."

I am altogether aware that my approach is "traditional"-that I draw upon both the oldest and the most recent *tradition* of our Christian communities. I know, then, that my position will have to be prophetic-in conformity with both the gospel and the needs of the poor. That is, my approach will have to be critical and liberative.

I have no particular wish to share in the fetishizing of famous authors, distinguished theologians, great works, and classic concepts. I am, however, interested in what all of these may in fact have to contribute to the task of solving the problems faced by Christians in today's world. Ours must not be academic mumbo jumbo, but a pursuit of relevancy-a treatment of the reality of actual life experience.

The whole of community ethics is a "road under construction." I welcome criticism, both negative and positive. In successive editions of this book I shall attempt to correct the errors that this work-like all finite discourse-must inevitably contain.

If I may be forgiven the repetition: far from pretending to replace the classic theological tractates on the subject, the present treatise refers to them, and some of them are listed in the Select Bibliography at the end of the book. Some of these works, in turn, contain their own bibliographies, some of them extensive.

I have said little or nothing about the state (except generally and indirectly), racism, or the organization of popular liberation movements. These and other such topics are treated in other volumes of

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the Theology and Liberation Series. Although I have not treated these subjects directly, I have accorded them *their place* in a complete discourse.