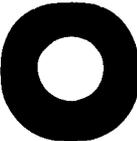


CHAPTER 5

The Devil and the Cosmogogenesis of Capitalism

f all work in the region, wage labor in the agribusinesses is held to be the most arduous and least desirable—even when the daily cash return is high. Above all, it is the *humillación*, the humbling authoritarianism, which agitates the workers, while the large landowners and their foremen complain of the workers' intransigence and fear their sporadic violence.

Lower-class people feel that work has somehow become opposed to life. "On the coast we have food but no money," mourn the immigrant workers from the Pacific coast. "Here we have money but no food." Locals contrast work in the poverty-stricken peasant sphere with that on the plantations, saying, "I would rather be fat without money, than old and skinny with money." They say that they can see how plantation work makes people thin and prematurely old in comparison with even the least remunerative peasant occupation. They fetishize the sugarcane, describing it as a plant that dries or eats one up.

In 1972, on their own initiative, people organized invasions of plantations and large farms. A broadsheet prepared for public distribution by a group of people who combined working on plantations with working peasant plots reads as follows:

We peasants reject the sugarcane because it is the raw material of slavery of the peasant people. We peasants are disposed toward changing the sugarcane for crops that we can consume here—like plantains, cocoa, coffee, rice, potatoes, and corn. The sugarcane only helps the rich and the government to buy more and more tractors to give luxury to themselves and their families.

Peasants! The sugarcane degenerates one; turns one into a beast, and kills! If we don't have land we cannot contemplate the future well-being of our children and our families. Without land there can be no health, no culture, no education, nor security for us, the marginal peasants. In all these districts one finds the plots of the majority of the peasants threatened by the terrible Green Monster, which is the Great Cane, the God of the landlords.

We emphatically reject the cultivation of sugarcane for the following reasons:

—the bad faith that these captains show by flooding our parcels of land with the water they use for their cane.

—even more! The fumigation that does damage to the peasant crops leaving us in the most tremendous misery, paving the way for them to send in their agents to buy up our land.

—the landlords took our lands from us for this purpose. Still there exist ancient people born at the beginning of the century who can physically narrate the imperialist history of these *señores* landlords. The holdings of our forebears are now concentrated into great *latifundia* reducing the recent born to the worst misery.

The Devil and Proletarian Labor

According to a belief that is widespread among the peasants of this region, male plantation workers sometimes make secret contracts with the devil in order to increase productivity, and hence their wage. Furthermore, it is believed that the individual who makes the contract is likely to die prematurely and in great pain. While alive, he is but a puppet in the hands of the devil, and the money obtained from such a contract is barren. It cannot serve as productive capital but has to be spent immediately on what are considered to be luxury consumer items, such as fine clothes, liquor, butter, and so on. To invest this money to produce more money—that is, to use it as capital—is to invite ruin. If one buys or rents some land, the land will not produce. If one buys a piglet to fatten for market, the animal will sicken and die. In addition, it is said that the sugarcane thus cut will not regrow. The root will die and the plantation land will not produce until exorcized, plowed over, and replanted. Some people say that although the money obtained through the devil contract cannot buy the aforementioned goods, it

should be shared with one's friends who are able to use it as ordinary money.

The contract is supposed to be made in the deepest secrecy, individually, and with the aid of a sorcerer. A small anthropomorphic figurine, referred to as a *muñeco* (doll), is prepared, usually from flour, and spells are cast. The male worker then hides the figurine at a strategic point at his place of work. If he is a cane cutter, for example, he places it at the far end of the rows of cane that he has to cut and works his way toward it, often chanting as he cuts his swath. Sometimes, a special prayer is said just before beginning the work. Another aspect of the belief is that the man working with the *muñeco* does not need to work any harder than the other workers.

Many foremen and even administrators believe in the use of the *muñecos*; they are afraid and would fire a suspect immediately. When this has happened, it is said, the worker has submitted without resistance. All foremen keep a sharp lookout, and they are very suspicious of anyone producing well above average. Some people note that the agribusinesses do not like workers to make more than a small fixed amount. The sensitivity of all concerned can be acute, and the belief permeates daily activity in a variety of forms. Plantation workers may chide a gang member who outpaces the rest, saying, "What a way you have come with the *muñecos* today!" In passing, it should be noted that the belief is held not merely by the most illiterate and credulous. Peasant-worker militants, leaders of modern political groups, also believe that these devil contracts occur.

Because the stories and accounts of the devil contract are told with a great deal of circumspection and in a narrative style that refers such contracts to other persons' doing, a cultural outsider like an ethnographer cannot be sure whether such contracts really do occur or are merely thought to occur. For my purposes it does not matter, because I am concerned with a collective belief. However, it can be stated that devil contracts are really made, although I suspect that they actually occur with less frequency than people assume. I know two folk healers rather well who will arrange such contracts, and one of my closest friends related the following account concerning his twenty-two-year-old cousin who recently made a devil pact. I have no doubts about the authenticity of this story. This cousin was born on the Pacific coast and came to the plantation town of Puerto Tejada as a young boy. In his teens he worked intermittently on the plantations and also made a few visits to his father on the Pacific coast, where he acquired knowledge of magic. He became increasingly resentful of plantation work and decided to make

a pact with the devil. To add to his already considerable magical lore he bought several books on magic from the plantation town marketplace and studied them. One day he went into a sugarcane field and eviscerated the palpitating heart of a black cat over which he cast his spell (*oración*, or prayer). No sooner had he done so than a tremendous wind came roaring through the sugarcane. Terrified, he ran away. "He did it in order to sell his soul to the devil, so that he could get money without working," said my informant.

Modes of Interpretation

What, then, is the meaning of this? This highly secretive, individualized, and rare occurrence is purely a supposition on the part of people. Nobody claims to have ever seen it, but nearly everyone has some hearsay evidence and firmly believes that it occurs, albeit, rarely. Like art at the beginning of history, magic and ritual, it is an experience set apart from the rest of life—in order to exercise power over it. Like the occasions of birth or death, the work situation as portrayed by the alleged proletarian devil contract is one of those situations that a society can seize upon to express its character.

We must see the devil-belief then not as an obsession or as a norm that ineluctably and directly guides everyday activities but rather as an image illuminating a culture's self-consciousness of the threat posed to its integrity. An image of this sort cannot be fitted like a cog wheel into a structural-functional "place" in society. Instead, the belief in the proletarian devil contract is a type of "text" in which is inscribed a culture's attempt to redeem its history by reconstituting the significance of the past in terms of the tensions of the present. "To articulate the past historically," writes Walter Benjamin, "means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. This danger affects both the content of a tradition and its receivers: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era an attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the Antichrist" (Benjamin, 1969: 255). In the case of the devil contract in the plantation cane fields, this imperiled tradition exploits the antichrist to redeem the mode of production of use-values and to wrest it from the alienation of means from ends under capitalism.

Our reading of the text offered us by the culture in the form of the supposed devil contract made by male proletarians will focus on the

culture's concept of cosmogony and on the meaning this concept creates when confronted with the radical transformation of the society's mode of production.

Let us first consider situations in which such a contract is supposed *not* to occur: peasants working their own plots or those of other peasants for wages; women, even when engaged in proletarian labor; market vendors; and the Pacific coast immigrants back home in the relatively self-subsistent nonmarket economy of the coast.

The Coast

Muñecos are a customary item of magic on the Pacific coast of Colombia, from where many migrants working in the valley come. But they are not used as they are alleged to be used in the valley's plantations. Instead, people use them in curing rites, as protection against theft, and as protection against sorcery. They are used not for gain but for alleviation of misfortune and for protection. In fact gain is what leads to illness and misfortune. As one anthropologist describing coastal black culture has written, "The resulting ethic is the antithesis of success" (Pavy, 1967: 279)—"success" being viewed here as market achievement.

On the coast blacks sometimes make recourse to Indian shamans, and it appears that Indians have absorbed some African magic too. S. Henry Wassén claims to have discerned African features in some of the equipment used by Chocó Indian shamans, especially their curing figurines (1940: 75–76). The figurines offer strong testimony of the plasticity of tradition and of the magical power of foreign influence, for in addition to dolls with African features there are dolls that are carved in the form of Europeans of the colonial period and others influenced by icons of Catholic saints. It is likely that the dolls referred to in the proletarian devil contract in the Cauca Valley are descendants or transformations of these same figurines, which embody the tutelary spirits of the shaman. It bears noting that the general cultural area surrounding the Cauca Valley at the time when African slavery was introduced was one in which the use of such figurines was common. Moreover, Nils M. Holmer and Wassén have noted the widespread distribution of these figurines among Indian cultures ranging across the north of South America from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic (1953: 84–90), and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff states that the Chocó Indians, inhabiting the northern half of the Colombian Pacific coast, formerly inhabited many regions inland and that even today some small groups have survived *east* of the Cauca River (1961: 230).

Drawing on the pioneering work of Holmer and Wassén, Reichel-Dolmatoff describes the use of dolls by Cuna and Chocó Indian shamans. Made from wood or clay in the form of humans or, less commonly, of animals (often distorted), the dolls form a central role in curing by exorcizing animal spirits or the influence of a vengeful shaman that has abducted the soul of the patient. Among the more acculturated Chocó Indians, most disease-afflicting spirits are thought of as spirits of the dead, and Indians under mission influence refer to such spirits as devils (Ibid.: 229-41, 494).

Reichel-Dolmatoff argues against those anthropologists who attribute a fertility function to the use of these dolls. In his opinion their use in pregnancy is not to increase fertility or to magically induce reproduction. Instead, they are critical to the ritual regulation of the process, concerned with preventing malfunction during reproduction. The Cuna Indian curing song and rite employed to relieve obstructed birth, published by Holmer and Wassén (1953) and made famous by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his essay "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (1967a), support this claim in full. Thus, insofar as there is a resemblance, we must be alert to the implication that the use of the dolls in the Cauca Valley plantations is not to be explained primarily as a desire to increase yield; it is the regulation of a dangerous process that is at issue.

This raises the importance of the analogy between production and reproduction. In use-value economies production is often metaphorized as reproduction, and both spheres are understood or expressed in the same ontogenetic concepts. Aristotle and the Schoolmen constantly extended the concepts of biological reproduction to the spheres of material production, exchange, and monetary exchange. Like these philosophers, the lower classes of the southern Cauca Valley find that metaphors and symbols in one sphere readily pertain to the other: for example, increasing production under incipient capitalist relations of production yields barrenness in nature and lack of reproductive power in wages gained. Interestingly, the everyday parlance of mature capitalist economics also utilizes biological metaphors (the "growth" of capital, factories referred to as "plants," and so forth), but these metaphors exalt capital by endowing it with fertility.

The Local Peasants

It is crucial to realize that the local peasantry are not thought to make contracts with the devil to augment productivity on their own plots. The logic of the belief preordains this. As the peasants point

out, such a practice would be self-defeating because the money gained in this way cannot be reinvested in equipment or land and because the contract renders the land barren. Despite the poverty that cruelly afflicts them and despite their desire for greater income, peasant proprietors therefore are said not to enter into devil contracts. Only when they are engaged in modern proletarian labor on the large capitalist farms are they thought to do so. Even those who work for wages for other peasants are not considered to make these contracts.

Allegedly, the only magic used in connection with peasant plots is good magic linked to the souls of the virtuous dead and the Catholic saints, and such magic is aimed at protecting the plot against theft and malign mystical influences. It is not used to increase production. For example, one rite ensures that, upon entering the plot, a thief will fall asleep until discovered by the owner. In another rite the owner leaves a sharpening stone, a machete, and a gourd of water, and the thief is forced to sharpen the tool and commence working until apprehended. In yet another rite the owner might have a snake—a fantastic terrifying snake which only a thief can see—that prevents entry and theft.

Women

Women working for wages on the plantations are generally thought *not* to make devil contracts. Again, this follows the logic of the belief because women are held to be the main, if not sole, providers for the household in general and the children in particular. Like those involved in Aristotle's category of a "householding economy" (*oeconomia*), they are understood to be embedded in a productive enterprise the end of which is not sheer increase. "In household management the people are of greater importance than the material property, and their quality of more account than that of the goods that make up their wealth" (Aristotle, 1962: 50–51). Since the money derived from the plantations through a devil contract induces sterility and destroys growth, one obviously cannot use it to raise one's children.

Women are heavily implicated in magic, it is said, in the use of sorcery against the lovers of their male consorts or, less commonly, against the unfaithful consorts themselves. In the majority of such cases the sorcery occurs when one of the women concerned is pregnant or giving birth. This redemptive sorcery is directed at the process of reproduction, not at material production as in the male proletarians' devil contract. When a man is directly afflicted by this

love magic, he is transformed into a lovesick fool, forever tied to the woman who casts the spell. An example of such a secret rite aimed at "tying" an unfaithful lover, who, as happens so often, was declining to provide for the upkeep of the children he had fathered, went as follows.

The woman obtained a cigar, a complete candle, four matches, and a candle stub. The ritual is most efficacious if the cigar and the complete candle are bought with money from the faithless spouse and if the remaining items are loaned by someone notoriously mean. Three of the matches were rolled into one and used to light the cigar. As she began to smoke it, the complete candle was cut into halves. When the cigar was half smoked, the candle stub was lit and then the half-candle was lit. Then the cigar was smoked at a furious rate, emitting large clouds of smoke over the candles, and she concentrated deeply on the man in question, whose name was Catalino. When the ash dropped she stamped on it, chanting, "*Catalino, hijeputa, Catalino hijeputa, Catalino, hijeputa*" (Catalino, son of a whore . . .). Variations on this procedure include reversing the cigar so that the lit end is in one's mouth while puffing, using four cigars but only smoking two, throwing them in the air so that they somersault, and chanting, "*Venite hijeputa, Venite hijeputa; parete hijeputa, parete hijeputa*" (Come, son of a whore . . . stay, son of a whore . . .).

Although some of the symbolism is obscure, much is obvious. Contagious magic is present in the buying of the items with the money of the man at whom the spell is aimed and also with the money from someone notoriously mean. Behind the principle of contagious magic one discerns that, in certain situations, an exchange of goods and money involves the notion that they embody and transmit a person's spiritual essence. The reversals and cutting in half of the ritual objects also follow laws of sympathetic magic, which are aimed at reversing the social situation implicating the woman and the man. The candle and the cigar, both alight, presumably symbolize the man's sexual potency. The candle is cut in half and the ash or seed that falls from the lit cigar is stamped on and destroyed, thus symbolically destroying his potency and seed in other women. At the same time the spell curses him in no uncertain terms and demands his return. The magic is not aimed at increasing yield. The rite is directed toward the destruction of the man's potency as it is extended beyond the bounds of his reproducing partner, at which point it becomes akin to the investment of capital aimed at sheer increase. This man can and must be kept within the bounds of

oeconomia, providing for his spouse and children, and prevented from irresponsible multiplication. An exchange system between a man, a woman, and their offspring is threatened by his embarking on a vastly different system of exchange based on endless gain or yield. Faith in the magical rite is a manifestation of the virtue of the former system and the illegitimacy of the latter.

Cosmogony

If economic success is regarded as dangerous on the coast and envy channeled through sorcery is rampant not only there but also in the plantation zones as a means of thwarting such success, then Tawney's reminder of the moral revolution underlying the birth of capitalism becomes extremely apposite. "The life of business, once regarded as perilous to the soul," he writes, "acquires a new sanctity." What is significant, he noted, "is the change of moral standards which converted a natural frailty into an ornament of the spirit, and canonized as the economic virtues habits which in earlier ages had been denounced as vices" (1958: 2-3).

The issue is clearly stated. There is a moral holocaust at work in the soul of a society undergoing the transition from a precapitalist to a capitalist order. And in this transition both the moral code and the way of seeing the world have to be recast. As the new form of society struggles to emerge from the old, as the ruling classes attempt to work the ruling principles into a new tradition, the preexisting cosmogony of the workers becomes a critical front of resistance, or mediation, or both.

Cosmogony deals with the fundamental bases of creation: change and the beginning and end of existence. It is to be found, as Mircea Eliade reminds us, as a living memory in myths of origin and salvation. These may take a myriad of forms, large and small, such as the New Year's Day celebration when the world is symbolically created anew, the coronation of a new king or queen, the marriage ceremony, or the formalities of war and peace. The myths are worked out in more everyday concerns as well—in saving a threatened harvest or in healing the sick. The profound significance of these rites, Eliade points out, is that "to *do* something well, or to *remake* a living integrity menaced by sickness, it is first necessary to go back *ad originem*, then to repeat the cosmogony" (1971: 157).

In referring this to the culture of the southern Cauca Valley, it is well to remember Evans-Pritchard's warning against assimilating

so-called primitive *thought* to the realm of modern Western mysticism. In the greater part of primitive and peasant everyday life, supernatural powers are not attributed to either persons or things, and the mystical assumptions and connections assumed are not the product of *mind* but of rite and collective representations inherited from generation to generation as *culture*. Above all, "We must not be led astray by Lévy-Bruhl into supposing that, in bringing in mystical causes, primitive man is thereby explaining physical effects; rather he is explaining their human significance, their significance for him" (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 115; 1933; 1934).

Only with these important qualifications can we concur with Eliade's view that the primitive ontological conception is one in which an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype of the original creation and that what lacks this exemplary model is meaningless and therefore lacks reality.

Even so, what tends to be overstated in Eliade's formulation is that the imitation involved is merely passive repetition of an archetype. To rectify this we need to stress that cosmogonic rites actively create reality and that their persuasive power lies precisely in the special type of knowledge that comes from creating.

Giambattista Vico's New Science might be appropriate here. It was a science of history formed in the wake of Renaissance magic and against the growing power of positivist-like doctrines. Against the atomism and utilitarianism of positivism, in which society is apprehended by instrumental rationality utilizing the epistemology of the physical sciences deploying the logic of scarcity and maximizing inputs, Vico saw man as a collective being, as the ensemble of social relations. People act as they do because of their membership in society, and their sense of this relation is as basic as are their material needs. Their experience of everyday life, their modes of expression, their sense of purpose, their fears and hopes—all these important aspects of human experience fall well outside the net cast by natural science. Like the Renaissance *magi*, Vico saw man as creator of himself and the social world. Like the Schoolmen, Vico took the view that one can only truly know what one creates and that to know something is in some important sense to become it, to become united with it. This parallels the magician's acquisition of power over the object by entering into it, achieving the unity of experience that is identical with creation (Berlin, 1977: 14). It was God who created nature, and our knowledge of nature would always be "external," a play on the surface of things. But what we could know from the "inside" was history and society, for we had created them. In Vico's own words:

In the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquities, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are, therefore, to be found within the modification of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows: and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations or civil world, which since men had made it, men could come to know. [1970: 52-53]

Now, more than two centuries later, it is not the neglect of the civil world by the natural philosophers at which we should marvel; rather, we should marvel at the engulfing of the understanding of the civil world by the canons of knowledge used in the physical sciences, so that, for instance, the exploitative relation between capitalists and workers becomes reified in the categories of capital and labor-time or, merely, capital. As Weber emphasized, this way of seeing society through the eyes of "formal rationality" was coincident with the rise of capitalism and with its very form, in which cause met effect in a self-enclosed interplay of meaning—the capitalist market, the separation of business from the householding economy, rational bookkeeping, and, above all, the capitalist organization and exploitation of "free labor." Proletarianization ushers in a new order of nature, "An immense cosmos in which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live" (1958: 54).

Creation, life and death, growth, production, and reproduction—these are the issues that preoccupy cosmogony. They are also the preeminent processes in the curing rites, in the sorcery, and in the alleged proletarian devil contract in the southern Cauca Valley, where peasants are being proletarianized. Yet, this new cosmos is still in the process of becoming. In this process the lower classes are liminal beings, neither peasant nor truly proletarian. Like the liminal personae in the rites of passage made famous by Victor Turner (1967: 93-112), their condition is one of contradiction and ambiguity, in which bizarre symbolization of death and birth is preeminent, symbols that are isomorphic with the historical status of the proletarianized peasants. As liminal beings—neither what they were, nor yet what they will become—the position of these half-peasants, half-proletarians is both negation and affirmation of all structural positions. We should therefore expect that they will thrust into

prominence the salient contrasts of the structures that enclose them, peasant modes of life and proletarian modes, and that theirs is the realm, as Turner puts it, of "pure possibility from whence novel configurations arise" (Ibid. : 97). The creation of the proletarian devil contract is one such novel configuration. To better understand it, we need first to sketch in the outlines of the local cosmology and its cosmogonic rites.

Cosmology Enacted

The popular cosmology of the Cauca Valley derives from that of the Catholic Church. No matter how odiously the Church is regarded, its religious impress has been and continues to be firm. Preeminent is the Christian myth of creation and salvation. This is constantly reenacted in the Church rites of Easter and of baptism, as well as in the folk rites of death, folk healing, and sorcery. Indeed, this fundamental aspect of Catholic cosmogony is repeated for more people more intensely in folk rites than in the Church itself. The Fall and the transcendence of evil as figured in the Resurrection can be said to be the basis of folk rites and magic.

The official Church vision of the cosmos as trisected into hell, earth, and heaven is greatly modified by the belief in the spirits of ancestors and by the very literal belief in spirit forces. These ancestor spirits are known as *ánimas* or "souls" (*almas*) or simply as "spirits" (*espíritus*). If unquestionably bad, they exist in hell or roam in the air, although the majority inhabit a special room or part of the sky. Every person has a spirit, which can desert the body and wander, especially at night. A young friend of mine drinks water before sleeping at night so that his spirit will not get thirsty and wander. At death, one's spirit tends to remain close by or to return to the earthly realm. The elaborate funeral rites and anniversaries for the dead are held to purify the spirit and to ensure that it achieves and retains its destiny in heaven. If, like Julio Arboleda the infamous slave and *hacienda* owner of the early nineteenth century, the dead person was unremittingly evil, then his spirit must constantly wander. He returns especially during Easter week when he can be heard urging on his mule train near Villa Rica. The *ánimas* of one's family tree, particularly one's mother and her mother, serve as intermediaries with God, the fount of nature, as people say. When one is in danger, one asks the *ánimas* for help. The appeal is made to thwart danger rather than to gain good fortune. The latter request is more

properly directed to the saints, as when one buys a lottery ticket. The saints, it is said, have more "respect." But if, for example, one is robbed, one appeals to the *ánimas*. Their role is redemptive. They are of the people. It is said, "The saints live in the Church; the *ánimas* live with us." The way in which the *ánimas* function in magic and in sorcery is not clear, but specialists venture the opinion that some sort of link is established between the spirit of the magician or sorcerer, spirits such as *ánimas* or evil spirits possibly including the devil, and the spirit of the victim.

The rites of death articulate these ideas concerning the *ánimas* with the archetype of Christ's death. They are the rites of greatest public communion and draw vast numbers of people to the house of the deceased, especially for the first and the last night—the ninth. The body is displayed the first night in an open coffin, upon which even the very poorest families will spend an enormous sum, perhaps even selling the family farm. Singing led by female kin lasts through the first night and eight more. The songs are Church derived, focusing on Christ's death and ascension, endlessly reiterating the drama of salvation and the analogy between the deceased's passing away and Christ's triumphant passage over death and life, suffering, and evil.

Easter rites attract a larger attendance than any other Church ritual. Easter Friday is the occasion of many taboos. Those who defy the prohibition of work risk harm, and blood may run from the plants they cut. The river must be avoided. The eerie and utterly strange silence that descends on the town is shattered at midnight on Easter Saturday when the dance halls and bars open once more to an exultant shriek of sound and gaiety.

In the folk rites for curing households one clearly sees the cosmogony reenacted. These rites are the most common form of magic. Even when only one person in a house has received the sorcerer's sting, the entire house as a living entity or as a small community is afflicted. The household is not only the social cell of the economic form, *oconomia*, but also the appropriate moral entity for the sorcerer's envy. People in an ensorcelled house commonly complain of one or more of three things: they work hard, but gain nothing; they suffer constant theft; or they are always sick.

There are many specialists in house curing, and most people can perform minor curing themselves. Prophylactic cures are also common. Even middle- and upper-class people in the cities have their homes cured, and at New Year, the women from the southern Cauca Valley sell large amounts of the aromatic plants used in the rite. Fac-

tories and large shops in the city also resort to such curing, according to these country women.

Only when I had the chance to witness the archbishop of Colombia with several of his bishops and many priests consecrate a new cathedral in the highlands of western Colombia did I realize how the folk rite of house curing is merely a scaled-down version of church consecration. (Or could it be that the Church rite came from the folk?) The phased form of the events, the ritual elements of salt, holy water, and incense, the chants, and, above all, the exorcism of the spirit of evil are all more or less identical. Small wonder that the Indians there regard Christ as one of the original shamans. The theme of exorcism aggressively directed against the devil, demons, and "the enemy" in order to achieve health of body and soul, protection, and salvation is particularly strong. For example, at the entrance to the cathedral the archbishop blesses the salt: "I exorcise you, salt, in the name of our Father Jesus Christ, who said to His apostles: 'You are the salt of the earth', and repeated by the apostle, 'Our conversation is always spiced with the salt of grace.' It is sanctified for the consecration of this temple and altar with the aim of repelling all the temptations of the demons so as to defend body and soul, health, protection, and the surety of salvation. . . . Bless this salt to make the enemy flee, impart healthy medicine for the benefit of body and soul for whoever drinks it. For Christ our Father, Amen." The holy water is prepared with ashes and wine, then sprinkled around the interior walls by the archbishop while the assembly incants, "Let us go to the house of the Lord. . . . Let this temple be sanctified and consecrated in the name of the Father." As he blesses the burning incense, the archbishop chants, "Lord bless this incense so that with its fragrance will banish all pain, all sickness, and all the insidious attacks of the enemy will be distanced from your child whom you redeemed with His precious blood. Let Him be free of all the bites of the infernal serpent."

Considering but two of the critical elements involved in the southern Cauca valley, salt and holy water, one can begin to see what happens in the conversion of official religion to folk rites. The essential ingredient in ensorcelling a house is "*sal*" (salt). It consists of a mixture of earth and ground-up bones and skulls from the cemetery, which is than "planted" in the vicinity of the house being ensorcelled. Holy water is essential in curing sorcery. It is obtained from the priest at Easter, after baptism, upon request or illicitly. The priests may bless water brought by any person at any time, but are hesitant to do so. In their own words, such usage may be fetishistic.

Yet they are forced to accede as a way of buttressing their power, and in so doing stimulate the pagan roots of their religion. A teenage boy, the son of a cane cutter, lists the following uses of holy water: "You sprinkle it in a house when a bad spirit such as the devil is present. You use it with incense when making 'a sprinkling' (*riego*) in a house for good luck. It is used in baptism. You use it to bless a person who has been ensorcelled. You use it to cure a house salted with witchcraft. It is used to prepare medicines, especially when a person is suffering from sorcery. You use it in any situation against sorcery."

Houses can be protected from sorcery by "planting" three crosses in front and three behind: "One never knows from where envy is going to come, from in front or from behind." The crosses come from a tree called "the tree of the cross" because of its cross-shaped grain. They are planted with "essences," costly perfumes bought in the marketplace. The full-scale curing rite is synchronized by the critical times associated with Christ's death. There have to be nine cleansings, just as there have to be nine nights for funeral rites, and this figure is supposed to be associated with his death. "Jesus suffered a punishment of nine days: Thursday to Sunday plus five more of great suffering." Moreover, the cleansings have to occur only on Fridays and Tuesdays, the days that people associate with the crucifixion and resurrection. These are the days most propitious for magic and sorcery throughout Latin America (Stein, 1961: 324; Madsen, 1960: 146; LaBarre, 1948: 178; Métraux, 1934: 90), and it is on these days that sorcerers and witches not only perform their evil deeds but also can most clearly discern actions taken against them. Old people say that these are the preferred days for planting crops, too. They are also considered to be "privileged days" because on them "the saints and the planets bestow great beneficence to the households that believe in this." Furthermore, the very hours most propitious for curing, midday and three o'clock, are supposedly those hours corresponding to the critical hours of Christ's drama on the cross.

Having divined that the house or person is afflicted with sorcery, the curer prepares medicines and incense. The medicines, known as the "irrigation" (*riego*), contain many ingredients and vary with the practitioner. Aromatic plants are commonly used, such as the seven varieties of *albaca*, verbena, and sometimes the hallucinogen, *datura*. Verbena is crushed on Easter Friday and is called the "ash of Easter Friday"; it has the property of exorcizing evil. Eliade draws attention to the idea that the potency of some medicines can be traced

to prototypes that were discovered at a decisive cosmic moment on Mount Calvary; they receive their consecration from having healed the Redeemer's wounds. Eliade cites a spell addressed to verbena in early-seventeenth-century England: "Hallowed be thou Verbena, as thou growest on the ground,/For in the Mount of Calvary, there wast thou first found./Thou healest our Saviour Jesus Christ, and staunchest his bleeding wound;/In the name of [Father, Son, Holy Ghost], I take thee from the ground" (1959: 30). Holy water and nine drops of a strong disinfectant are added, together with nine drops of *quereme*, a rare and somewhat mythical perfume, which is said to attract members of the opposite sex. Sugar, lemon juice, and aspirin (known as *mejoral* [bettering]) may also be mixed in. A spell ("conjururation"), usually derived from old books on magic, is cast over the mixture together with a strophe such as this one referring to the plants: "You whom God left and the Virgin blessed, for all the centuries and the centuries, Amen." A practitioner comments: "The plants have great virtue. They have spirit. They reproduce seeds and themselves. That is why they have virtue. They produce aroma. This is an important part of their power." Typical of the conjurations are those in the book *The Most Rare Secrets of Magic and the Celebrated Exorcisms of Solomon*. A curer friend tells me, "Solomon is a great magician who was born at the beginning of the world."

Followed by a retinue of household members the curer exorcises the house, sprinkling the medicines on the walls and the floors, often in the form of the cross, and paying special care to doorways, windows, and beds. First, the house is cleansed from inside outward, then from outside inward. The house is then not to be swept for three days thereafter—"until the medicines penetrate." Incense bought from a pharmacy is burnt and wafted in the same way. Simultaneously, the curer chants songs referring to the creation, death, and resurrection of Christ. An oft repeated refrain goes: "Go away evil, enter goodness, thus Jesus Christ entered the house of Jerusalem." Another chant is this: "House of Jerusalem in which Jesus entered, I ask our Lord, Go away evil and enter goodness, because thus entered Jesus, triumphant in the sanctified house of Jerusalem, with these plants that the same God gave us, and that the Virgin blessed. God helps my intercession, because God is for all His children, and for all the centuries."

The curer usually has a bottle of other medicines, which is drunk with the household members. The household head provides brandy, which is added to a mixture that contains many of the ingredients

used in the irrigation plus other plants sometimes including *chondur*, an aromatic root obtained from wandering Putumayo Indian herbalists and magicians, in whose curing rites it has a central importance. The largest herb stall in the local market of this predominantly black region is managed by a Putumayo Indian, and insofar as there is a hierarchy of curers, Putumayo Indians stand at the apex. Not only do local black curers obtain plants and charms from these Indians, but many of them have been cured and thus educated and sanctified by the Indians, whose rites they then partly imitate. Both blacks and whites attribute vast magical powers to these outsider Indians because they see the Indians as primitive, bound to the natural world and creation of first things. Local tradition may also associate these Indians with Renaissance magic and the mysticism of Mediterranean antiquity in the Cabbalah.

By means of these and other manifold connections, local cosmology as enacted in rites of cosmogony recreates the history of European conquest in which whites, blacks, and Indians forged a popular religion from Christianity and paganism. From its inception this religion sustained beliefs attributing magical powers to the different ethnic groups and social classes, according to the role they played in the conquest and in society thereafter. Taken as a whole, this popular religion is a dynamic complex of collective representations—dynamic because it reflects the dialectical interplay of attribution and counterattribution that the distinct groups and classes impose on each other. Thus, in a restless dialectic of the conquered transcending their conquest, the social significance of inequality and evil is mediated through the immersion in the pagan of the conquerers' myth of salvation.

Incredulity and the Sociology of Evil

The sugar plantation agribusiness towns are notorious for the amount of sorcery said to exist in their midst. For this reason curers far and wide refer to these centers as "pig sties"—sorcery being commonly called *porquería*, piggish filth. Sorcery (and its curing) cancels inequalities in this society of insecure wage earners in which competition pits individualism and communalism against one another.

The commonly cited motive for sorcery is envy. People fear the venom of sorcery when they feel that they have more of the good things in life than others do. Sorcery is evil, but it can be the less-

er evil when it is directed against the greater evil of exploitation, failure to reciprocate, and the amassing of ill-gotten gains. Those who are better off constantly fear sorcery and take magical steps to prevent its penetration. And with good reason. A close friend of mine told me how his desperately poor mother and her three children were evicted by a landlord for not paying rent. In fury she retaliated by ensorcelling the house. Nobody dared live in the house thereafter. In another case a friend of mine and his fellow worker in the plantations tried to bribe a tallyman into recording more work than they had done. The tallyman refused, and they solicited an Indian magician so as to dispose of him through sorcery.

Although murky premonitions of class struggle can be seen in this envy-laden sorcery, not all sorcery is directed by the poor against the better off; neither is sorcery directed against the true ruling class—the plantation owners or the heads of government, for example. People give two reasons for the absence of sorcery against the feared and hated ruling class. First, the rulers don't believe in sorcery. Second, even if they did, they could employ superior magicians because they are far wealthier. These are interesting reasons because in areas of southwest Colombia that have less capitalist development, such as the *hacienda* areas in the mountains, the *hacienda* owners do in fact believe that many of their misfortunes are due to the sorcery of their peons. These *hacienda* owners combat such sorcery by making expensive pilgrimages to Indian shamans whose fees or remoteness puts them beyond the reach of the peons (who, nevertheless, persist with their mystical form of class warfare). This does not occur in the agribusiness areas; hence, I conclude that the more critical of the two reasons given above is the one that the people emphasize: agribusiness owners do not believe in this sort of sorcery.

This indicates that the people who believe in sorcery recognize that the sorcerer's power depends upon the existence of a shared culture, through which medium sorcery achieves its end. In acknowledging the incredulity and hence immunity of their rulers, the working class of the plantations thus acknowledges and discriminates changes in the culture of classes as such cultures change in accordance with the transformation in the modes of production—from *hacienda* production to agribusiness.

In the proletarian devil contracts the plantation owners are not aimed at or afflicted, at least not directly. It is alleged that by means of the contract the worker in the capitalist mode of production, and only in this mode, becomes more productive—more productive of income and of barrenness. As we shall see in chapter 7, such a belief is the logical outcome of the confrontation of a philosophy based on

use-value and the capitalist mode of production. The magic in the devil contract is directed not at the plantation owners but at the sociohistorical system of which they are part. The proletarian neophytes have lost a class enemy susceptible to magical influence, but they stand to win a new world in their realization of that enemy's disbelief.