PART III

Our findings in the light of a theological ethic
CHAPTER 10

A theological-ethical critique
in outline

10.1 THE AIM OF THIS CHAPTER

In this part I depart from the distanced, 'objective' stance which at least intentionally characterised my deliberations in Parts I and II, and take a definite stand within the plethora of convictions found in South Africa. This needs some explanation.

I do not share the presumption that convictions are of necessity both irrational and irrelevant for concrete, down-to-earth social processes and concerns, that they should be ignored as far as possible, or at least crowded out of public life into the sphere of private spirituality where they can do no harm.

In the multipurpose survey of the HSRC, 50,88% of White, 54,01% of Indian 61,79% of Coloured and 45,10% of urban Black respondents confessed that religion played a 'very important' role in their lives. If we add those who said that it was 'important' we get very high percentages: 79,93%, 92,22%, 93,54% and 78,02% respectively. Those who thought that religious movements have an 'important' or 'very important' impact on South African
society in general were 78.98%, 71.11%, 75.49% and 62.22% of the respondents in the four race groups respectively.

If these findings are anything to go by, they indicate that South African society is not only very religious, but that it also expects religion to have a profound impact on social processes. If one adds convictions both concerning cultural group identity and income distribution, the propensity of convictions to determine socio-economic and political power structures seems to be great indeed.

On the other hand it is difficult to escape the overall impression of experience and social research that practical decisions are normally taken on the basis of a very shallow sort of utilitarianism and pragmatism. Amongst the poor, one expects issues concerning food, shelter, security, even mere survival, to dominate life and this is indeed the case (Schlemmer 1981). Amongst the affluent and powerful, political control, high incomes and social privilege are certainly the decisive operative motivations in South Africa. Furthermore, the prospects of a 3% rise in GST created a spending spree of unparalleled proportions throughout the country before July 1, 1984. Saving seems to be at a low ebb throughout the population. Such observations cast doubts on the impact of convictions on real behaviour, let alone on social structures.

How is one to account for this contradiction? I believe that, while there is still some considerable potential for the impact of convictions on behaviour, vital interests have been allowed to crowd out, overrule or manipulate convictions to such an extent in practical daily decision-taking, whether private or corporate, that the latter do not in fact realise this potential to any appreciable extent. Convictions of all kinds have become
largely irrelevant in the concrete issues of life. This means that our 'spiritual life' (including cultural and economic ideas and ideals) has become very shallow.

If this impression should be true, it would present us with a formidable ethical problem. Public life is impossible without some sort of overarching system of meaning (including its normative system). Meaning can be either transmitted in the form of a social consensus through socialisation and internalisation, or it can be imposed on the population by its most powerful elites. If naked interests take over, however, a power struggle ensues in which not the meaningfulness of life and ethical acceptability win the day but the accidental distribution of power between groups and sections of society. The result is that humanity loses its unique gifts of collective self-determination and accountability and becomes a helpless victim of social and psychological forces beyond its control.

On a world scale this seems to have lead to the widespread diffidence and helplessness concerning some of the greatest perils mankind has had to face in its long history: the East-West conflict, the North-South conflict, the race conflict, the time bomb of population growth, industrial growth and ecological breakdown, the escalation of regional conflicts with ever more powerful conventional arms and the ultimate danger of a nuclear holocaust. A determined and effective attempt to solve such enormous problems depends on quite definite 'spiritual' pre-suppositions.

There seem to be good reasons, therefore, why we should make an attempt to rediscover and vitalise the potential power of convictions. Our very survival as a species seems to be at stake. Human beings are not sufficiently guided by natural laws
and instincts. They have to make sense of their world and subject themselves to a set of norms directly derived from what they perceive to be ultimate truth. If they allow themselves to drift into a mood in which the satisfaction of every short-term need or desire receives priority, they lose their bearings and end up in self-destructive pursuits. It is freedom and responsibility, founded in the spiritual dimensions of life, which make us distinctly human if compared with animals and plants.

It has become increasingly obvious in the natural sciences that it is no longer possible to continue with the development of nuclear power, chemical substances or genetic engineering without some sort of ethical accountability because the danger of the collective suicide of the human race is imminent. If that is the case in the natural sciences, social sciences have reason enough to take note. The tensions and conflicts which make these new powers so dangerous arise, after all, in the social, economic and political spheres of life. The ideal of a 'value-free science' is no longer appropriate at the end of the twentieth century. And the ground we have lost in the development of an ethic of adequate relevance for the rapidly evolving 'post-modern' situation is considerable. This is why - apart from my professional interest - I end this study with a brief ethical consideration of some of the issues raised in this study.

We define ethics as a reflection on what ought to be (or to happen) and how human beings can be liberated and motivated to bring it about. This presupposes a normative system, derived from an overarching system of meaning which is, in turn, anchored in a set of non-negotiables or 'ultimates'. Some issues seem to be so obviously 'common sense' in nature that decisions can be taken on purely rational, pragmatic, 'value-free' grounds. But things are obvious only within a given system of
meaning and its normative system. The latter are normally simply taken for granted by unreflective minds who hold their point of view to be self-evident in day-to-day decision making. But this is an illusion; there is no neutral ground on which we could stand.

There is nothing irrational, therefore, in taking one's point of departure in a specific conviction. In fact, it is quite inevitable. The only question is which conviction it shall be. This is not left to our whims. Convictions are not under our control. They impress their truth and validity on our consciousness, or they are not convictions. For the purposes of this study we shall take the Christian faith as our point of departure. Others may be compelled by conscience to opt for an alternative.

Our task is to reflect ethically on three dimensions of social reality in South Africa: economic power structures, patterns of conviction and the relation between the two. I presuppose that things can go wrong in all three of these dimensions and that it is the task of a Christian theological ethic to take an informed and considered, yet committed stance in each case. In this chapter I offer a Christian theological critique of what we have observed in Parts I and II of this study and come up with some suggestions in the next.

In keeping with my systems-theoretical objectives, my prime goal is to design a paradigm for future detailed investigations and propositions. The limitations of this study do not allow me to go much further.
In Part I South African power structures were analysed in various dimensions. We have seen that our society is one of the most unequal in the world. The affluence and power of a small elite co-exists with crippling poverty and impotence of masses of the population. In between there are the more common stages of relative deprivation and relative privilege.

Relative deprivation and relative privilege have their problems which need to be tackled. But these are dwarfed by the problems caused by the extremes of absolute poverty and absolute affluence. Thus it is here where our emphasis should fall. A situation of extreme discrepancies is unacceptable from a Christian ethical perspective - whether in South Africa or in the world as a whole.

There are two overriding concerns in this connection: the dangers of both the extremes of poverty and affluence to human well being and the serious impairment of social relationships caused by the existence of such extremes.

Absolute poverty is unacceptable because of the intense suffering it entails. The Christian faith knows of suffering as a creative and redemptive force in the world. But then it is the suffering which the strong voluntarily take upon themselves for the sake of the weak, or the suffering which becomes an occasion for the weak to develop spiritual powers of hope and determination to regain control over their lives, not the suffering imposed on helpless victims by design, circumstances or fate, nor the suffering which is fatalistically taken for granted. The statement that God's mercy is poured out over
those who are irredeemably stranded, is a protest of faith, not an acceptance of suffering as a value.

(a) Physical suffering generated by absolute poverty is the most obvious. Famine can lead to death. Malnutrition causes deficiency diseases, reduced resistance to bacteria and permanent brain damage in children. Poor people lack clothing, soap, water and sanitation. Houses are overcrowded, have leaking roofs and muddy floors if there are houses at all. The pain of hunger can only be appreciated by those who have undergone the ordeal for some length of time. In spite of their reduced energy reserves, poor people normally have to work hardest, whether as unskilled labourers or women walking long distances to fetch water and fuel. They have to stand for hours in overcrowded buses and trains. Their permanent state of exhaustion causes listlessness and carelessness and, as a result, low performance, low salaries, low job security. They are often situated in unsafe social environments, the easy victims of crime and delinquency.

(b) Psychological suffering is less obvious but no less severe. Poor people do not get the opportunity to develop their intellectual potential in caring homes and well-equipped schools. Their freedom of choice and the possibilities of exercising their will power are curtailed. The satisfaction of their aesthetic and erotic needs remains at a primitive level if it is developed at all. The higher development of art, literature, music, drama, etc. is beyond their reach.

(c) Psychological suffering has a social dimension. Poor people feel that they are outcasts, even if they form the majority of the population. They are not taken quite seriously by those who have become their reference group. Their income seems to be a reflection of what they are worth to society. Nobody seems to care if they are in difficulties. No public outcry is forthcoming if they perish. As a result they lack self-esteem, self-confidence, initiative, hope. Their communication with others is impaired and their sense of participation in the projects of society is lacking. They are 'marginalised'.

(d) Even the spiritual life of the poor suffers. They easily fall prey to the idea that they have been rejected by God. "God only loves the Whites" is a saying which can often be heard among poverty-stricken Blacks. A perpetual sense of guilt and inadequacy and a proximity to utter hopelessness prevail. A loss of hope is tantamount to spiritual death.
(e) On the socio-political front the sorry picture continues. Poverty-stricken people are, in contrast with the more privileged, not organised in interest groups. They cannot exert group pressure. In the corridors of power they are neglected, forgotten or taken advantage of. They may not qualify as voters. They may offer an oversupply of unskilled labour for which there is no market. They lack the sophistication and the channels of communication to utter their grievances. If they resort to violence, they are treated as criminals and deviant elements of society. They do not even make good revolutionaries, as Karl Marx observed.

(f) But society also suffers from the existence of poverty in its ranks. Poverty breeds crime. Poverty may force a rural African to transgress influx control regulations. He is thrown into prison where he makes contact with harder elements. Respect for the law is lost. Hatred for the 'oppressors and exploiters' builds up. Desperation breeds drug-taking, alcoholism, promiscuity, broken families, uncared-for children, irresponsible behaviour on account of a lack of socialisation and integration. Poor people tend to have large families for a variety of reasons, such as old age security, ignorance of family planning methods, absence of alternative values and satisfactions, etc. In the end the state has to spend millions of Rand on police, prisons, rehabilitation schemes, slum clearance, sanitation, control of epidemics, the containment of social unrest, terrorism, etc. Increasingly the state is seen to be the protector of the rich against the floodwaters of the poor who have to be kept at bay. Poverty is immeasurably expensive in terms of social cost.

The enormous extent of absolute poverty among the underdog population groups in South Africa and in the Third World as a whole presents daunting problems which cannot be solved overnight. The least that can be expected, however, is that those on whose side economic potential and political power has accumulated, shall actively want to tackle these problems. This means that they shall not use their leverage to place obstacles in the way of the advancement of the poor or allow structures to develop unchecked which are positively poverty-creating (as has been done in South Africa on a massive scale) but that countervailing processes shall be institutionalised which redeem the
situation as far as humanly possible. To be neglectful or cynical in this regard is ethically unacceptable, socially irresponsible and ultimately suicidal - or so it seems.

Gradually, we also become aware of the dangers of absolute affluence. The rich have their own typical health problems. Ecologically, the sprees of the affluent lead to incredible wastage and pollution on a world-wide scale. Resources desperately needed by the less fortunate are squandered on luxuries. The greater the availability of luxuries the lower their value. Because of the law of diminishing marginal utility, luxuries are less and less satisfying and you need ever higher inputs to derive some joy from your possessions. High suicide rates betray that all is not well in personal relationships and the fulfilment of life. Endless self-justifications show that the affluent lack the assurance of their right to be what they are - which is the metaphysical foundation of life. Socially the rich live in isolated enclaves separated by walls of cement and status from the rest of humanity and its problems. Their burden of responsibility often overtaxes human capacities and leads to heart-attacks and nervous breakdowns - or the flight into indifference and irresponsibility. Where the poor are plagued by impotence, the rich are plagued by an over-abundance of potency.

The relationship between the affluent and the poor is either non-existent or deformed. Here I do not refer to structural mechanisms which operate in the asymmetrical interaction between centre and periphery and which was analysed in some detail in Part I. Here I am concerned, rather, about inter-personal and inter-group relationships. Vertical relations derived from structural position lead to typical attitudes. The superior group is either condescending or dominating, the inferior group is either submissive or rebellious. Either hatred or a wrong type of love
characterises the relationship on both sides. Normal interaction is made impossible. We do not need to be completely equal in all respects to be able to relate naturally with each other, but we need to be visibly of equal dignity before God and humanity.

All this has wider repercussions too. Poverty is, at least to a considerable extent, the cause of the population explosion. Food production may not be able to keep pace and a series of droughts has already caused the death of hundreds of thousands in Africa just beyond our borders. The pressure on the land which reached crisis proportions in the Black rural areas, leads to soil erosion, depletion of grazing and wood, pollution of water resources, etc. Affluence leads to unchecked industrial growth, the depletion of mineral and agricultural resources and pollution. From both the rich and the poor the balance of nature comes under pressure and ecological breakdown is within sight - in South Africa and in the world as a whole.

The disturbed relationship between rich and poor increases the conflict potential in the society. It is further fuelled by competition for dwindling resources. Armed conflict with increasingly powerful and sophisticated weapons has plagued the Third World since World War II on a growing scale. We have our own share of that on the northern border of SWA/Namibia and a low-key civil war is shaping up within our country. The day on which the super-powers begin to fight, will mark the eclipse of our planet as the unique bearer of human life in the cosmos. It is impossible to discuss all these aspects in detail. A summary picture must suffice (see figure 1).
Figure 1
Network of effects of extreme economic discrepancies
This short survey should leave no doubt in anyone's mind that, from a theological-ethical point of view, the existing situation of extreme potency discrepancies in the South African society are highly undesirable. This statement alone is, however, only the beginning of our task. We now have to analyse the causes of their genesis, perpetuation and deepening. Chapter 5 offered a model and a few preliminary observations which could be utilised in this respect. Then we have to devise a program for the institutionalisation of countervailing structures and processes. This can only be done successfully in interdisciplinary cooperation between experts, policy-makers and administrators. The task of the theological ethicist in this working group is to highlight the demands and prerequisites of social justice and their foundations in the spiritual sphere. To the latter we have to turn now.

10.3 A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF CONVICTIONS

The object of convictions (viz. ultimates and their systems of meaning and normative systems), are not under the control of the human being; they control the human being. We cannot question them; we are being questioned by them. We cannot pick and choose in which ultimates we care to believe; they impress their truth and validity on our consciousness. We cannot be forced to believe in any truth which claims ultimacy, we cannot even force ourselves to believe; ultimates impose themselves upon our conviction. If all that were not the case, they would not be ultimates.

Yet ultimates are not beyond critique. Ultimates can be challenged, deposed and replaced by other ultimates which have a greater power of conviction.
They can also be found wanting if they are unable to cover a vacuum of meaning caused by unprecedented shifts in experienced reality. Thus faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel, was in a crisis when the tribes moved from a nomadic, into a settled agricultural life; again when their political, social and religious institutions were crushed by the Assyrians and Babylonians; and again when the Jewish faith was challenged by Persian and Hellenistic cosmologies. The Christian faith and many other traditional religions are critically challenged in modern times by science, technology and the secular revolution in all spheres of life. Whether ultimates are able to survive this crisis depends on their versatility in rapidly changing circumstances and their capability of undergirding new aspects of experience which constantly emerge in accelerating historical processes. A great number of would-be gods have crashed from their thrones and their places have been filled by a great number of equally short-lived substitutes - one of the reasons why modern men and women have turned agnostic, secular and cynical.

It is not immaterial, therefore, which convictions hold sway over us. Convictions must be subjected to critique. And they can only be subjected to critique from the point of view of an ultimate that claims to be more profound, in fact the ultimate of ultimates. Adherents of the Christian faith have been compelled by conscience to make this claim throughout its history, as have related convictions such as Judaism, Islam, liberal humanism and Marxism.

From the point of view of the Christian faith an ultimate must answer to the following criteria:

(a) It must be comprehensive in time, space and power. Any ultimate that covers only part of experienced reality is in
danger of being thrown out of gear by emergent and uncovered factors — and of misleading its adherents into unwholesome directions. This means that as a matter of principle, it must transcend the limitations of experienced reality as a whole.

(b) An ultimate, therefore, must also be able to give meaning to the whole of reality. It must posit a set of values which structures perceptions in a system of priorities. It must posit a set of norms according to which the right of existence of the human being and his world is either confirmed or questioned. It must posit a set of goals which will guide motivation into a definite direction.

(c) An ultimate must also be able to integrate apparently meaningless aspects of reality, in particular the annoying problems of human limitations in terms of power, space and time, the existence of evil and the inscrutability of fate.

(d) An ultimate that is to bring the human being into its own must place humanity into the centre of the universe, yet see it in the context of its natural, ecological environment. It must define the human being as a unified bodily, psychological, social and spiritual entity. It must see it as a creature gifted with freedom and responsibility, creativity and redemptive fellowship, dignity and the ability to serve.

(e) It must take account of human depravity and provide for mental and social structures which make life as tolerable and prosperous as possible under given circumstances. It must hold out at the same time, the prospects of ultimate redemption, because human beings cannot live without the reality-transcending power of hope.

It is impossible to apply these criteria to each and every one of the convictions enumerated in chapter 8. It should be quite
obvious, however, that each one of them - including most of the living forms of the Christian faith - falls short in either one aspect or a whole series of them. African traditional religion, scientific-technological pragmatism, various forms of nationalism and tribalism, free enterprise capitalism, Marxism and others have at least one type of deficiency in common: they fail to cover the wide context on which the wholesomeness of human life depends. Their limited horizons lead to distorted value-priorities, they question or confirm our right to existence on the basis of inappropriate norms, they misguide our motivation to short-sighted and less worthy goals. The traditions of the fathers, the glory of the fatherland, the excellence of one's own culture, the achievements of technological progress, economic growth at all costs, the inevitability of world revolution - all these have inspired many to sacrifice their life and prosperity and to take the life, prosperity and happiness of thousands of their fellow human beings. The victims of such inappropriate convictions in South African history alone are countless. And to emphasise once more: the living forms of the Christian faith have been no better in this respect than other convictions.

All this is sufficiently obvious for us to leave it there at this stage. An ethical reflection which operates on the level of moral indignation alone is not worth our time. We need to begin with a critique of the metaphysical foundations of life or we shall achieve nothing at all. Moreover, if we are serious in our desire to redeem the situation, we cannot but witness to the creative power and the redemptive love of God in Christ as an alternative to less profitable ultimates, and pray that this alternative may reveal sufficient power of conviction to displace its rivals. This is the area of evangelisation and our task is to make evangelisation more directly relevant to the issues discussed in this study.
10.4 A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF THE INTER-ACTION BETWEEN STRUCTURES AND CONVICTIONS

Our deliberations in Part II have focused on the crucial interaction between vital interests and convictions. Vital interests are the pivotal entity between structures and convictions. On the one hand they represent needs which are derived from structural location. On the other hand vital interests present these needs in an interpreted and prioritised form, thus adding meaning and normativeness to their crude form. Meaning and normativeness are derived at least partially from the system of meaning and its normative system - or they are formulated in conflict with the latter.

Assuming that convictions are acceptable in their own right, there can be little quarrel with them determining the content and pursuit of interests. This is, in fact, how it should be: Human needs and desires are moulded by the source and criterion of reality as a whole. Thus they are taken out of the sphere of petty selfishness and placed into the greater context of a meaningful corporate existence where they receive both their legitimacy and their limitations. Thus the Biblical faith is not oblivious to the prerequisites of human well-being, whether bodily, social, psychological or spiritual. But these needs are interpreted and prioritised in such a way that they do not cause harm to human beings or to their social environment.

It is vital interests emancipated from this benign rule that cause the problem. Pretending to represent the genuine demands of the normative system, they assume a meaning-giving and normative authority of their own. We have seen that this happens in three ways: manipulation of the meaning-giving and normative system, misrepresentation of the true nature of the interests and
their pursuit, and the declaration of autonomy for the realm in which they occur. Thus vital interests practically act as counter-convictions. Since they are not readily recognised as such, their struggle with the prevailing convictions ends up in a sort of syncretism which confuses both the social group pursuing the interests and those at whose expense the interests are being pursued.

This confusion takes place in all three of the avenues along which convictions and interests interact: Counter-values lead to selective perception and a deformed system of priorities; counter-norms lead to a system of self-justifications; counter-goals lead to inclinations which compete with the motivations derived from convictions. In each case the values, norms and goals are argued to be in harmony with, or actually derived from, the prevailing meaning-giving and normative system. This makes their demand seem unassailable. Where this cannot sensibly be maintained, they are declared to lie outside the realm in which the prevailing ultimates claim truth and validity, leading to a sort of free-for-all situation. Free for all means free for those who have the power to pursue their interests at the expense of others.

It is clear that this type of interest-based ideology is ethically unacceptable. Its basic dishonesty is obvious. Its results are, in many cases, quite devastating - both for those who justify the pursuit of their interests and for those who are the victims of such a pursuit. In the first place ideological self-justifications allow a detrimental course to be followed without effective challenge. Perpetrators and victims are fooled by its apparent acceptability. However, since it is a fabricated acceptability, the conscience of those involved has to be pacified all the time with endless arguments and selected facts. Such a process of
rationalisation and repression is psychologically unhealthy. Spiritually it is fatal, because it prevents sin from being confessed, forgiven and overcome.

In this connection it should be noted that ideological self-justification is neither 'justification by works' (viz. through rectifying the inappropriate situation or course of action) nor 'justification by faith'. Self-justification without works, by mere arguments, is surely its most vicious and self-deceptive form.

Secondly, ideological smoke-screens present a distorted picture of reality. The real nature of both the system of meaning and the project that is being pursued (or the institutions which entrench the interests concerned) is being obfuscated. The problematic situation is not analysed at all, or it is misinterpreted.

In the third place rationalised inclinations direct human motivation towards questionable goals. Short-term, selfish needs and desires of one group may be satisfied at the expense of long-term interests of the society as a whole. Symptoms may be dealt with as they present themselves, while the underlying problems are not tackled.

Finally, interest-based ideologies prevent dialogue and cooperation. Ideologised people from opposite camps engage in a dialogue between the deaf, if they talk to each other at all. They do not seek each other's cooperation because they deeply distrust each other's motives. This means that a societal problem which is the problem of all groups in that society and needs corporate attention, is defined and tackled by each group separately according to its own selfish goals, its partial insight and its limited power, if it is tackled at all.
A check-list model for a critique of the interaction between power structures and convictions.
We are not in a position to go into further detail. The reader may find ample exemplifying material in Part II of this study. Suffice it to say that the manipulation of convictions by vital interests merits the attention of theological ethics. The problem has traditionally been treated under the heading 'justification and sanctification'. Our task is to take this discussion out of its narrow individualistic and personalistic frame of reference and show its relevance for the social-structural sphere. We also need to give more attention to the aspects of perception and motivation within this whole problematic.

Apart from their co-determination of vital interests, social power structures have two other effects: they determine the amount of power at the disposal of a group with which it is able to pursue its interests, and they partially determine the breadth of horizon which influence a group's operative information. Thus we have an excess of power in the centre and a lack of power in the periphery; a horizon in the centre which is so wide that it includes the metropoles of the world and overlooks the plight of its own periphery, a horizon in the periphery which is so narrow that it overlooks its own potential.

All the factors discussed so far have been integrated into the model depicted in figure 2. It can serve as a check-list for a critique of the whole system: convictions, interests, interaction between interests and convictions, distribution of structural power. This model should be compared with figure 1 in chapter 6.

If we wanted to complete the picture of obstacles to the solution of the overall syndrome, we would have to add technical problems encountered by specific initiatives. They are caused by the relative rigidity of existing structures and processes.
This rigidity has a historical dimension which we called tradition in the case of convictions and causality in the case of structural mechanisms (see chapter 6).

10.5 SUMMARY

In this part I leave the 'objective' stance taken in my analyses so far in favour of a commitment to a specific conviction, viz. the Christian faith. This chapter offered the model for a critique of social reality in South Africa from this particular vantage point.

I began with a theological-ethical critique of highly inequitable power structures in the South African society. Absolute poverty, absolute affluence and distorted relationships between elite and underdog population groups were the main areas of concern. A model of the network of effects which arise from the discrepancies has been offered.

Then my theological-ethical critique turned to convictions. I debunked the idea that ultimates and their meaning-giving and normative systems are beyond critique and offered a set of criteria against which they have to be measured. I ventured the statement that most convictions, including the living forms of the Christian faith, fall short on various counts.

Then the relationship between convictions and power structures was subjected to a theological-ethical critique. The pivotal point of this relationship is constituted by vital interests because they are both structure- and conviction-related. Where acceptable convictions determine the content and pursuit of interests, there is no quarrel. The problem begins where interests emancipate themselves from integration into a comprehensive system of
meaning and normativeness, manipulate the meaning-giving and normative system and abuse its authority. We saw that perceptions, justifications and motivations all become distorted in the process and that interest-based ideologies effectively prevent the corporate analysis and active solution of social problems.

I briefly mentioned three other factors which present obstacles to the solution of the whole syndrome: (a) the horizon or awareness of different groups, (b) the social power which groups wield (both of which depend on structural position) and (c) the technical problems caused by the relative rigidity of existing structures and processes.

The overall impression of this chapter is that a moralising critique of inequity is of no avail. Theological ethics has to penetrate to the roots and the mechanics of the processes which underlie its genesis, perpetuation and deepening. The three traditional areas of social justice, evangelisation and 'justification-sanctification' have then to be made relevant. Whereas this chapter has been critical by design, we now have to turn to the positive contribution theological ethics could make to a solution of the syndrome.