6-1-1956

The Anthropology of Communism

Arthur Simon
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, artsimon@verizon.net

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF COMMUNISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

---

by

Arthur Simon

June 1956

Approved by: Paul M. Bretscher
Advisor

J. A. Thiele
Reader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Scope of the Study

This essay is an investigation of the communist view of man and an attempt to indicate a few implications of the same for the Christian Church. The topic itself is a broad one. The available material, both primary and secondary, comprises too long a list for the research this writer was able to do. The bibliography will indicate, however, that at least some of the basic primary writings were consulted as well as a number of the better commentaries on communism.

The Purpose

The purpose of the research was not to say something that had not already been said in a more capable way. The motive was purely personal interest based on the conviction that while everybody admits communism to be a tremendous power whose end no one can tell, a way of life which for numerous reasons calls Christendom to give an account, still we are content for the most part to ignore this challenge. And when Christians are aroused, often more sincerity than intelligent judgment is evident. The injunction to be "as wise as serpents and innocent as doves" has not always characterized the church's attitude toward social and political

problems, and the rise of communism and the church's subsequent dealing with it is an outstanding example of that fact.

Understanding Communism

The difference between Marxism and communism as we know it today--Marx as he has arrived through the mediation of Lenin--is a factor which ought to be kept in mind. That there are differences is generally acknowledged. The extent and meaning of the differences, and to what degree they were implicit in or contrary to Marx, is a matter of much debate. In some instances these differences will be indicated, but it is a problem that cannot possibly fall within the scope of this essay. In general it is said that Lenin added these distinctive features to Marx: (1) he made Marxism relevant to a situation in which the majority were peasants; (2) he emphasized the role of the disciplined party; (3) he was greatly pre-occupied with problems of dictatorship and power; (4) he made communism relevant to the colonial world by making the colonial peoples the world proletariat.[1] The question whether or not Marx would be a Communist today is purely hypothetical. In general it is the opinion of this writer that the alteration (or extension) of original Marxism was either implicit in Marx or an inevitable result of a real-

---

[1] John Bennett, in a class lecture at Union Theological Seminary, New York, February 8, 1955.

istic attempt to make Marxism work in a world such as ours. At any rate Marxism as we must deal with it today assumes a position of primary importance. We should neither overlook these differences nor deal with them in a void apart from their particular orthodox manifestation today. The writer should also mention in this connection that he has used the terms Marxism and communism interchangeably for the most part. He did so purposely to avoid "loading" the words and tempting the reader to find implications where none exists.

Because they are cloaked in partial truths most easy conclusions about communism are false, and if not harmful, at least unproductive. For example, because communism is totalitarian it is commonly classified with fascism and regarded as a similar type of moral cynicism. This is not correct. A little more than a year ago a Rome correspondent for a Stockholm newspaper attempted to evaluate the appeal of communism in Italy. Why should there be any great appeal when all the wicked truth about communism was being publicized? Because the facts seemed to contradict the daily experience which Italians had with their Communist neighbors. The Communists present a substantial record of activity and achievement in the past. Furthermore, they are the kind of people who are willing to make great sacrifices for their cause and to help people who need help. They are often fine examples of what a mother or father ought to be. Conclusion:

propaganda about communism is false.

But this only begins to open up the problems. Communism will be treated in this essay not as an atheistic or materialistic philosophy or as a totalitarian way of life, but as a new secular gospel--and much more: a Christian heresy. It is called a Christian heresy because there are many aspects of communism which have a close affinity to Christianity. Indeed it would hardly have been possible for the communist philosophy to have originated outside of a Christian or post-Christian culture. A few of the striking similarities between communism and the Christian faith are doctrines of sin, redemption, justification, sanctification, and heaven. These are to a certain extent arbitrary designations, yet parallel beliefs are plainly evident. One Roman Catholic author refers to the Communist Party's likeness to the Church in the categories of "one, holy, catholic and apostolic."[2] However these similarities may be labeled, communism does represent in the first instance a world-religion that has found new meaning in history and has discovered the role which men may play in appropriating that meaning to themselves, and as such the Christian Church must face it.

At this point the scientific basis which communists claim for their way of life will be summarily indicated. For the

---

[2]Giorgio La Pira and others, The Philosophy of Communism (New York: Fordham University Press, 1952), p. 5.

most part the following description on the next two pages is taken from a small booklet by Stalin that has been called the catechism of communism.[3]

The philosophy of communism is dialectical and historical materialism. Dialectical materialism is the communist view of the world of nature. Historical materialism is the extension or application of the principles of dialectical materialism to social life. Historical materialism is what communists are chiefly interested in. That this is so is evident in all Marxist literature. The Communist Manifesto, for example, has practically nothing at all about dialectical materialism. But it is important to understand that for them historical materialism is not at all a philosophy in the usual sense of the word, rather a science--a science of society which is merely an extension of the natural sciences into the sphere of human history. So in order to understand historical materialism it is necessary to know what dialectical materialism is.

Dialectical materialism is the world outlook of communism. It is dialectical because that is its method of interpreting the phenomena of nature. It is materialistic because that is its interpretation of nature.

Dialectics is the direct opposite of metaphysics, say

---

[3]Joseph Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism (New York: International Publishers, 1940), passim.

the communists, because it regards nature as (a) completely and organically inter-related; (b) constantly in a state of movement and change; (c) changing not by a simple process of growth, but by abrupt, qualitative changes; and (d) exhibiting a struggle between opposites, because it holds that internal contradictions inhere in all things. Hence there is a negative and positive side to all things, something dying and something developing.

Philosophical materialism is the direct opposite of idealism and says that the world is material. Thought is a product of matter. The world is fully knowable; there is nothing in nature which cannot (potentially at least) be known.

Extend these principles to social studies and historical materialism emerges, a completely unified view of life that welds together science and society, thought and action.

Marx and Engels searched into the life of society with the knowledge that ideas, theories and institutions arise out of the material life of society. They found that there are numerous material factors which influence the growth of society, but the determining influence is to be found in the economic sphere, more particularly, in the means of production.

They looked into the historic past and discovered that human history is a history of class divisions, and five different periods of class divisions are evident: primitive,

slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist. All have emerged thus far according to the dialectical pattern, and the determining material influence in each case has been a development in the means of production which in turn has forced a change in the relations of production. Right now the capitalist society pits two classes against each other: bourgeois and proletariat. The outcome of this struggle, the synthesis, will be the classless society and real humanity and freedom.

What is not self-evident to many should also be added: that communism cannot be understood in the light of the USA, 1956. Any serious effort to understand it means projecting oneself to begin with into the economic, social, and religious picture of Europe of a century ago--a period when the Church was experiencing something less than a golden age, a period which accelerated the conflict between science and religion and produced Charles Darwin, a period in which many good church people were honestly horrified when Marx and Engels incorporated into the Manifesto such radical measures as a graduated income tax, abolition of inheritance rights, free public education for all children and abolition of child factory labor. Today understanding communism requires in addition the same sort of projection into the life of the people of the world where communism is either in power or making a serious bid for allegiance.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNISM AND HUMAN NATURE

Marx and Engels were less content to think in terms of "man" or "human nature" than they were to talk about men and people. Not man in the abstract, but men in the concrete. And as heralds of a new world faith, they had definite beliefs regarding the nature of men as well as their destiny. Significantly, communism begins with a much more profound sense of evil than optimistic humanism, but as we shall see it also represents a radical belief in man's ability to shatter this evil, and so in the end we will have to classify it with optimism. Its disgust of man has more to do with the grip of circumstance upon him than with any innate corruption. "That 'human nature' changes was their general contention. That 'human nature' is to be understood neither idealistically nor mechanistically, but dialectically, was their specific procedural credo."[1] Which simply means that for Marx and Engels, human nature was neither a universal form or essence, nor the sum total of separate individuals; and that far from being positioned in a static world, men are running the dialectical race of history.

---

[1]Vernon Venable, Human Nature: The Marxian View (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 4.

Man's Natural Origin

What kind of evidence did Marx and Engels have that humans change at all, not to mention their natures? They found their most general assurance, interestingly enough, in the inorganic sciences, according to Venable.[2] Change in human nature was probably regarded by them as consonant with change and evolution in the rest of nature. At their time the idea that the cosmos had a non-mechanistic past was not uncommon, but relatively young, and Darwin's Origin of Species first appeared in 1859. Writing to Engels shortly after its publication, Marx said, "this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view."[3] Marx held it to be a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history.[4]

Venable says that Marx and Engels believed in a "labour-conditioned evolutionary development."[5] They say that while there are many different ways of distinguishing men from animals, "They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of sub-

---

[2] Ibid., p. 13.

[3] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Correspondence (New York, International Publishers, n.d.), p. 126.

[4] Ibid., p. 125

[5] Venable, op. cit., p. 71.

sistence. . . ."[6] Engels wrote: "Labour . . . is the primary basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself."[7] In fact Engels sees labor as the principal factor in monkey's development into man, according to Bober, who re-capitulates a description of this event from a newspaper article written by Engels. Because of the requirements of work, the man-like ape gave up walking on all fours and dedicated his hands to the sole function of work.[8] Marx exalted the place of work in his Capital, too, and indicated its reaction upon human nature.

> Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.[9]

Thus the mode of production is ultimately responsible for the human nature of any given period. But, as is indicated in the

---

[6]Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, quoted by Venable, op. cit., p. 66.

[7]Friedrich Engels, Dialectics of Nature, quoted by Venable, op. cit., p. 49.

[8]Mandell Morton Bober, Karl Marx's Interpretation of History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), p. 79.

[9]Karl Marx, Capital (New York: Random House, 1906), pp. 197-98.

quote above, this is not simply a mechanical process, but a process of inter-action in which men's needs play a role. Production is dialectical in character. It arises from need and in satisfying that need in turn produces new ones.[10] There are four factors in the process of production, two subjective, two objective. They are (1) labor itself, (2) social organization of labor, (3) the natural object of labor, and (4) the instruments or tools of labor.[11] There is some disagreement as to the relative causal importance of these four factors. Stalin says that changes begin with the instruments of production.[12] This would presumably mean that labor would be considered crucial in man's natural origin, while in his social development the tools of production take first place. However Venable believes it is unfair to Marx and Engels to dogmatize on the position of these casual factors.[13]

Regarding the relative force of heredity and environment, while not ignoring the former, Marx clearly lays emphasis on environment. He believes that natural differences have been overdrawn. "In principle a porter differs less

---

[10] Venable, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

[11] Ibid., pp. 83-89.

[12] Joseph Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 31.

[13] Venable, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

from a philosopher than a mastiff from a greyhound. It is the division of labor which has placed an abyss between the two."[14]

The Fall and the Promise

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." So write Marx and Engels in the opening paragraph of the Communist Manifesto. In a later edition Engels footnoted this sentence to call attention to the fact that "written history" is meant and not "pre-history"--about which little was known when the Manifesto first appeared. Since then, he said, much evidence had turned up regarding primitive society, village communities where a primitive type of socialism obtained. "With the dissolution of these primaeval communities, society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes." In his Origin of the Family Engels laboriously attempts to reconstruct some phases of the primaeval existence on the basis of primitive tribal customs that are alleged to be hang-overs from the early stage. The purpose seems to be more to undermine by anthropological evidence the moral sanctions of the bourgeois world than to tantalize readers with the glories of communal life. In Anti-Duehring Engels asserts that private

---

[14]Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, n.d.), p. 140.

property existed to a limited extent in ancient primitive communes.

> It developed even within these communes, at first through barter with strangers, till it reached the form of commodities. The more the products of the commune assumed the commodity form, that is, the less they were produced for their producers' own use and the more for the purpose of exchange, the more the original primitive division of labour was replaced by exchange also within the commune, the more did inequality develop in the property of the individual members of the commune, the more deeply was the ancient common ownership of the land undermined, and the more rapidly did the commune move toward its dissolution and transformation into a village of small peasants.[15]

Private property, when it first cropped up, was limited to certain objects. There was still common labor and ownership of the means of production. But as tools were created production advanced and products were exchanged, and a division of labor resulted.

Marx and Engels never seem too concerned about the origin of evil. They often refer to it in jest or sarcasm. They seem to regard the matter as somewhat irrelevant, largely beyond the scope of investigation, but certain that any evidence that does turn up will substantiate their suspicions. Marx says that the legend of theological original sin tells us how man was condemned to eat bread in the sweat of his brow, but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there

---

[15] Friedrich Engels, Herr Eugen Duehring's Revolution in Science (New York: International Publishers, 1939) pp. 179-80. Hereafter Engels' book will be referred to as Anti-Duehring.

are people to whom this is by no means essential.[16] In Anti-Duehring Engels ridicules Duehring's political-domination view of evil's origin, for which he uses the Robinson Crusoe story. Why did Crusoe enslave Friday? Just for pleasure? Obviously for economic reasons.

> In any case, we must surely say that we prefer the old Semitic tribal legend, according to which it was worth their while for the man and woman to abandon the state of innocence, and that Herr Duehring will be left the uncontested glory of having constructed his original sin with two men.[17]

Nevertheless it is apparent from all the writings of Marx and Engels that if the origin of sin is not thoroughly dealt with, the seriousness of evil is never forgotten. It is an evil in which economics plays a determinative role. Engels quotes Hegel approvingly: "One thinks he is saying something great if one says that mankind is by nature good, but it is forgotten that one says something far greater in the words 'man is by nature evil.'"[18]

What is this radical evil? It is a moral and economic taint which Marx calls "private interest."

> The peculiar nature of the material it [economics] deals with, summons as foes into the field of battle the most violent, mean and malignant passions of the human breast,

---

[16] Marx, Capital, p. 784.

[17] Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 171.

[18] Friedrich Engels, Feuerbach (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1903), p. 84.

the Furies of private interest.[19]

Greed would be a synonym for private interest according to Engels.

> Bare-faced covetousness was the moving spirit of civilization from its first dawn to the present day; wealth, and again wealth, and for the third time wealth; wealth, not of society, but of the puny individual, was its only and final aim.[20]

Bober discusses the taint of self-interest as presented by Marx and Engels and says the two men are aware that human beings possess finer traits as well, but these virtues are more evident in small, everyday affairs in a marginal sort of way, while self-interest is the dominant passion which figures in the march of history.[21] Bober emphasizes that this passion of self-interest is compound in nature in that it pervades every area of life. The economists had their "economic man" and Machiavelli his "political man" but these were conceived of as relatively restrictive traits. Adam Smith, for example, believed that in social life "fellow-feeling" was the dominant force, while with Marx man was the apotheosis of self interest.[22] Bober attempts to determine whether or not self-interest is an inborn trait. He con-

---

[19]Marx, Capital, p. 15.

[20]Friedrich Engels, Origin of the Family, quoted by Bober, op. cit., p. 71.

[21]Bober, op. cit., pp. 72-74.

[22]Ibid., p. 73.

cludes it is probably inborn as a sort of slumbering instinct that has been aroused by economic factors but can be put to sleep again under a socialist environment.

According to the Marxist version man "descended" rather than "fell" into sin--not a sudden catastrophe, but rather an evolutionary process which gains momentum until it reaches its climax in the developed periods of capitalism. So Marx can say that the early accumulation of capital "plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology."[23] This is an interestingly late period in history for Marx to find economic original sin, and it makes sense only in terms of capitalism as the highest stage in the perfection of self-interest.

There is a deep sense in which every stage of the "fall" is ennobled as well as renounced, for they are stages of man's historic ascent. So, says Engels, slavery is damnable, but

> the introduction of slavery under the conditions of that time was a great step forward. For it is a fact that man sprang from the beasts, and had consequently to use barbaric and almost bestial means to extricate himself from barbarism. The ancient communes, where they continued to exist, have for thousands of years formed the basis of the most barbarous form of state, oriental despotism, from India to Russia. It was only where these communities dissolved that the peoples made progress of themselves, and their first economic advance consisted in the increase and development of production by means of slave labour.[24]

---

[23] Marx, Capital, p. 784.

[24] Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 200.

Besides, as we shall see, it was the very contamination of self-interest which Marx and Engels proposed to unleash in a radical attempt to push history beyond its reach. Rousseau looked back to a stage of primitive goodness with nostalgia. Marx, with more realism than sentiment, discerned that only radical surgery could cure social cancer.

Because Marx saw the evil in man as a deep-seated evil and because he was convinced that the corporate and interrelated character of his surroundings made it impossible for man to extricate himself from them, he determined to overthrow all shallow prescriptions for help. Man simply was incapable of raising himself above the taint of self-interest. In the preface to his Capital he wrote:

> I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense couleur de rose. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interest. My stand-point, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.[25]

Having eliminated God, and having observed the unproductive character of moral appeals, he regarded any redemption which fell short of the abolition of classes and the overthrow of all existing moral standards as absurd. However Marx's great

---

[25] Marx, Capital, p. 15.

measure of insight into the hidden hypocrisy of much that pawned itself off as religion and morality, and his own indignation over the social evils of his day are fundamental considerations in any ethical evaluation of Marx or present day communism. The writings of Marx and Engels are full of moral indignation. The Capital contains stirring descriptions such as the following quotations from a public health report written by a doctor about Bradford.

> "In one small cellar measuring 1500 cubic feet . . . there are ten persons. . . . Vincent Street, Green Aire Place, and the Leys include 223 houses having 1450 inhabitants, 435 beds, and 36 privies. . . . The beds--and in that term I include any roll of dirty old rags, or an armful of shavings--have an average of 3.3 persons to each, and some people, I am told, are absolutely without beds; they sleep in their ordinary clothes on the bare boards--young men and women, married and unmarried, all together. I need scarcely add that many of these dwellings are dark, damp, dirty, stinking holes, utterly unfit for human habitations; they are the centres from which disease and death are distributed amongst those in better circumstances, who have allowed them to fester in our midst."[26]

The righteous wrath of Marx extended beyond the confines of industrialized living to colonial exploitation. Writing on "The Future Results of British Rule in India," he said:

> The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms to the colonies, where it goes naked.[27]

---

[26] Ibid., p. 728.

[27] Karl Marx, New York Tribune, August 8, 1853, quoted in Handbook of Marxism, edited by Emile Burns (New York: Random House, n.d.), p. 193.

In the Manifesto Marx and Engels point out that in previous societies oppressed classes were able to raise themselves while engaging in the class struggle. In contrast, the modern laborer, instead of progressing with the development of industry "sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class." But, says the Manifesto, the advance of industry replaces the isolation of the workers with a kind of association that is revolutionary in character. And so the bourgeoisie is producing its own gravediggers.

The Communist Manifesto breathes the same sort of indignation.

> All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only insofar as the interest of the ruling class requires it.

And again:

> You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population. . . .

The Manifesto proposes to abolish freedom, for "bourgeois freedom" is freedom to trade and sell and produce at the expense of others. It proposes to do away with the "individual" --the bourgeois, middle class owner of property. "This person must, indeed, be swept out of the way, and made impossible." It seeks to abolish the family.

The bourgeois claptrap about the family and education,

> about the hallowed co-relation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.

So because individual effort had proved futile, Marx and Engels propose class action. The self-interest of the proletariat as a class becomes a holy interest--holy because pursuit of this interest alone can lead to a redemptive society. Here communism shows its realism. Failure to contend with force is self-deception, for force cannot be wished away by virtuous reflections. In reality, in actual experience "non-resistance to force brings more force." The question is not one of ethics at all in the usual sense, for it cannot be determined on the basis of a static society. Says Marx, the capitalist maintains his right when he tries to make the working day as long as possible or make two working days out of one. The laborer maintains his right when he tries to make the working day one of normal duration.[28] Of course the two alternative "rights" are so cast that Marx's own sympathies are obvious. But in any account, history must determine, and here the social dialectic rushes to support the struggle of the proletariat.

> The new forces of production have already outgrown the bourgeois form of using them; and this conflict between

---

[28] Marx, Capital, p. 259.

> productive forces and mode of production is not a conflict which has risen in men's heads, as for example the conflict between original sin and divine justice; but it exists in the facts, objectively, outside of us, independently of the will or purpose even of the men who brought it about.[29]

Marx and Engels hotly contested any proletarian movement which toned down the class struggle.

> As for ourselves, in view of our whole past there is only one path open to us. For almost forty years we have stressed the class struggle as the immediate driving force of history, and in particular the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution; it is therefore impossible for us to co-operate with people who wish to expunge this class struggle from the movement.[30]

Venable says that in looking back upon man as a nature-controlling creature they were well satisfied, but regarding his past as a history-making creature they had to conclude that failure was the general rule; that in fact there "has not yet been any 'human' history at all."[31] When Marx speaks of the present bourgeois social order as "the closing chapter of the pre-historic stage of human society," he deliberately withholds the term history from anything that has happened so far.[32]

Marx and Engels plainly view the results of the holy war

---

[29]Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 293.

[30]Marx and Engels to several, 1879, Correspondence, p. 376.

[31]Venable, op. cit., p. 74-79.

[32]Ibid., p. 79.

of the proletariat as the redemption of society, but they refused to give descriptive content to that phase of history. The means of achieving that history was their concern. But in the very process of setting forth the means, Marx and Engels allowed themselves an occasional far-off glance into the promised land. And their very judgment of existing conditions was a promise of what the coming redemption would bring.

Engels sets forth the redemptive plan in a famous section of Anti-Duehring.[33] The seizure of the means of production by society puts an end to the domination of product over producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by conscious planning. The struggle for individual existence comes to an end. Man finally cuts himself off from the animal world and enters conditions which are really human. Now man becomes conscious master of nature and social organization.

> It is only from this point that men, with full consciousness, will fashion their own history; it is only from this point that the social causes set in motion by men will have, predominantly and in constantly increasing measure, the effects willed by men. It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.[34]

And again:

> In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes,

---

[33] Engels, Anti-Duehring, pp. 309-10.

[34] Ibid., p. 310.

> the political authority of the state dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over nature, his own master--free.[35]

Religion

In the light of such prophecy and promise communism obviously takes on religious dimensions. It unflinchingly sets itself up as the proper object of faith. Since this is a matter of great practical significance and since its attitude toward religion sheds light on its doctrine of man, the writer shall briefly indicate this attitude.

The Manifesto says that law, morality, and religion are "so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeous interests." And again: "The charges against Communism made from a religious, a philosophical, and, generally from an ideological standpoint, are not deserving of serious consideration."

Marx in the Capital makes frequent references to the Church, to Christianity and to religion. For the most part they are merely derogatory asides or connections. Some of them are more than that. For Marx the religious world is the reflex of the real world.

The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case,

---

[35] Friedrich Engels, Socialism, Utopian and Scientific (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 75.

> only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to nature.[36]

Marx quotes a Church of England clergyman by the name of Townsend from whom, Marx asserts, Malthus often copied pages, and who

> glorified misery as a necessary condition of wealth. "Legal constraint (to labour) is attended with too much trouble, violence and noise, . . . whereas hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but as the most natural motive to industry and labour, it calls forth the most powerful exertions." Everything therefore depends upon making hunger permanent among the working class, and for this, according to Townsend, the principle of population, especially active among the poor, provides. "It seems to be a law of nature that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident. . . , that there may always be some to fulfil the most servile, the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community. The stock of human happiness is thereby much increased, whilst the more delicate are not only relieved from drudgery . . . but are left at liberty without interruption to pursue those callings which are suited to their various dispositions . . . it the Poor Law (--Marx) tends to destroy the harmony and beauty, the symmetry and order of that system which God and Nature have established in the world."[37]

Marx says that the Church of England "will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on 1/39 of its income."[38] "Protestantism, by changing almost all the traditional holidays into workdays, plays an important part in the

---

[36]Marx, Capital, pp. 91-92.

[37]Ibid., p. 710.

[38]Ibid., p. 15.

genesis of capital."[39] Constantly linking the church against the workers, he inveighs against Christians who "show their Christianity by the humility with which they bear the overwork, the privations, and the hunger of others."[40]

Engels, in Feuerbach elaborates several times in surprising detail on evolution of religion. Of the new world-religion, Christianity, he simply says: "Enough, the fact that after two hundred and fifty years it was a state religion shows that it was a religion answering to the circumstances of the times."[41] He makes this observation in Anti-Duehring: "Christianity knew only one point in which all men were equal: that all were equally born in original sin. . . ."[42]

Commenting on communism in the early church, Engels ascribes this to sect solidarity and points out that it rapidly ended this practice.[43]

---

[39] Ibid., p. 303, footnote.

[40] Ibid., p. 291, footnote.

[41] Engels, Feuerbach, p. 120.

[42] Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 114.

[43] Ibid. In the introduction to Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, Engels also comments on various branches of Christendom. The Roman Catholic Church was "the great international centre of feudalism. . . . It surrounded feudal institutions with the halo of divine consecration. . . ."(16)

"The Lutheran reformation produced a new creed indeed, a religion adapted to absolute monarchy. No sooner were the peasants of Northeast Germany converted to Lutheranism than they were from freemen reduced to serfs.

"But where Luther failed, Calvin won the day. Calvin's

Almost without exception religion is depicted as openly hostile to the interests of labor. Religion is bad even when it appears to side with needs of the workers, as the Manifesto sarcastically observes.

> Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. . . . Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart burnings of the aristocrat.

It is of great significance that Marx and Engels oppose any outright persecution of religion. Engels is quite pointed in this respect.

> Herr Duehring, however, cannot wait until religion dies this natural death. He proceeds in more deep-rooted fashion. He out-Bismarcks Bismarck; he decrees sharper May laws not merely against catholicism, but against all religion whatsoever; he incites his gendarmes of the future to attack religion, and thereby helps it to martyrdom and a prolonged lease of life.[44]

In the light of subsequent history this is most remarkable, and it has been a source of continued frustration for commu-

---

creed was one fit for the boldest of the bourgeoisie of his time. His predestination doctrine was the religious expression of the fact that in the commercial world of competition success or failure does not depend upon a man's activity or cleverness, but upon circumstances uncontrollable by him. . . . While German Lutheranism became a willing tool in the hands of princes, Calvinism founded a republic in Holland and active republican parties in England, and, above all, Scotland.

"In Calvinism, the second great bourgeois upheaval found its doctrine ready cut and dried."(17-18)

Interestingly, the only favorable mention the writer could find in Capital on any religion or religious leader was a long footnoted quotation from Luther in which he denounces usurers (pp.649-50).

[44]Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 346.

nists. Berdyaev has indicated the ineptness of communist propaganda against religion.[45] Bernard Pares believes the Bolshevist attack against the church was the best thing that could have happened to it, but he points out that such opposition is always aimed at the teaching of faith, not the profession of it.[46] Pares quotes Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Education who led the attack in the earlier days of Stalin: "Religion is like a nail, the harder you hit it the deeper it goes into the wood."[47]

Is Man Determined or Free?

Marx said that his stand-point "can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them." And Engels called the reorganization of society "humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom." Is man then wholly determined? Or is he still allowed an area of freedom and responsibility?

Venable points out that the materialism of Marx is dialectical, not mechanical, and this leaves room for human

---

[45] Nicolas Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism (London: Geoffry Bles, 1937), pp. 161-64.

[46] Bernard Pares, Russia, (New York: The New American Library, 1949), pp. 109, 72.

[47] Ibid., p. 110.

action provided this is understood as interaction in terms of a pluralistic causality and not the "hollow abstraction" of "cause here, effect here."[48] Venable concludes that man does have a hand in his destiny whether he likes it or not, and the question is one of intelligent use. This is a considerate interpretation of Marx, but it differs only in emphasis, if it differs at all, from interpretations of modern orthodox Communists. Stalin says that social ideas, theories, views, and political institutions have their origin in matter; but regarding their significance, "historical materialism, far from denying them, stresses the role and importance of these factors in the life of society, in its history."[49] And Emile Burns says that historical materialism is

> not a materialist "determinism"--the theory that man's actions are absolutely determined by the material world around him. On the contrary, man's actions, and the material changes which these actions bring about, are the product partly of the material world outside him, and partly of his own knowledge of how to control the material world. But he only gets this knowledge through experience of the material world, which, so to speak, comes first.[50]

If there is a difference in emphasis between Venable and the latter two it is not unimportant. The problem of determinism in Marxism is one which has been a sore spot almost from its

---

[48] Venable, op. cit., pp. 190-91.

[49] Stalin, op. cit., p. 22.

[50] Emile Burns, What is Marxism? (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945), pp. 10-11.

inception. Austin Lewis, writing in an introduction to a 1903 edition of Feuerbach, feels constrained to call attention to "modern" developments "in the direction of rigidity of interpretation, and to the exaggeration of the broad theory of the predominance of the economic factor into a hard and fast doctrine of economic determinism."[51] Lewis goes on to quote an article by Engels dated 1890 in which he confesses that he and Marx are partly responsible for the fact that "younger men have sometimes laid more stress on the economic side than it deserves." Since they were frequently attacked on this point they felt it necessary "to emphasize the dominant principle denied by them," and he regrets that this may have caused them to ignore other factors.[52] In a letter to a J. Bloch dated the same year Engels said:

> According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. . . . If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure--political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc.--forms of law--and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma--also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining

---

[51] Austin Lewis, in Feuerbach, by Engels, p. 19.

[52] Ibid., p. 25.

> their form. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (i.e., of things and events whose inner connection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we regard it as absent and can neglect it), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.[53]

So ultimately, no matter how highly the interaction of other factors are regarded, there is the return to the economic factor which "finally asserts itself as necessary." Writing to an H. Starkenburg four years later Engels makes the point even more plain.

> Men make their history themselves, but not as yet with a collective will or according to a collective plan or even in a definitely defined, given society. Their efforts clash, and for that very reason all such societies are governed by necessity, which is supplemented by and appears under the forms of accident. The necessity which here asserts itself amidst all accident is again ultimately economic necessity. This is where the so-called great men come in for treatment. That such and such a man and precisely that man arises at that particular time in that given country is of course pure accident. But cut him out and there will be a demand for a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found. That Napoleon, just that particular Corsican, should have been the military dictator whom the French Republic, exhausted by its own war, had rendered necessary, was an accident; but that, if a Napoleon had been lacking, another would have filled the place, is proved by the fact that the man has always been found as soon as he became necessary. . . .
>
> So with all other accidents, the apparent accidents, of history.[54]

This brings us to a crucial point in the view of Marx and Engels regarding the contradictory forces of freedom and

---

[53] Marx and Engels, Correspondence, p. 475.

[54] Ibid., p. 518.

necessity--just this: for them there was no contradiction at all, but freedom was embodied in necessity. Man is free not by innate independence or disassociation he may have from his surroundings, but he is free to the extent that he understands what is necessary.

> Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the appreciation of necessity. "Necessity is blind only in so far as it is not understood." Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work toward definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves--two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with real knowledge of the subject. Therefore the freer a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, with so much the greater necessity is the content of this judgment determined. . . . Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development.[55]

Man finds freedom in relation to the world of nature not by trying to place himself above the laws of nature, but by discovering those laws and hence using them for his own purposes. If a man is inside and must go out of doors but has no possible way of determining what the weather is outside, he admittedly is confronted with numerous possible choices as to what he should wear. If, however, he knows what the weather is,

---

[55] Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 125.

he may have no real choice at all. Yet it is in the latter instance that genuine freedom obtains. This is the sort of freedom that Marx and Engels sought in man's social life. Man was not moved blindly by mechanical operations, for man could determine the real basis and direction of life, and in co-operation with this knowledge become a maker of history as well as a sufferer. In this picture man is both a victim and a hero, determined and yet a world-transformer. Understanding what is necessary he identifies his action with necessity and his reward is freedom.

Knowledge and Action United

Since it is knowledge which frees man, then what is its nature and content? The Marxist theory of knowledge is activistic, and this is undoubtedly one of its most compelling aspects, for it makes the communist philosophy of history a dynamic one, one able to unite people for action. We are confronted with a religious certainty that claims absolute scientific validity and within which is embodied a program for action.

> It is essential . . . to realize from the outset that Marxism does not claim recognition because it is based on abstract moral principles, but because it is true. And because it is true, it can be and should be used to rid humanity for ever of the evils and misery which afflict so many in the world to-day, and to help men and women forward to full development in a higher form of society.[56]

---

[56]Burns, op. cit., p. 3.

If the communist philosophy is not an abstraction, but rooted in the material life of society, then it is evident that labor plays a key role in producing the theory; indeed it is not surprising that one criticism of capitalism is that it erects an artificial barrier between manual and mental work.[57] Communists assert that the strength and vitality of their philosophy lies in the fact that it never divorces itself from the real life of society,[58] either in origin or in practice.

In Anti-Duehring one of Engels' concerns is to unfold a scientific epistemology. He severely criticizes the philosophers of the French enlightenment who proposed to subject everything to merciless rational criticism and produce a new pattern for society based upon eternal truth and justice. They failed to transcend the limits of their own epoch. "We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealised kingdom of the bourgeoisie. . . ."[59] So every attempt in the field of social studies which entertains static ideas is on false epistemological grounds.

> Political economy is therefore essentially a historical science. It deals with material which is historical, that is, constantly changing; it must first investigate the special laws of each separate stage in the evolution

---

[57] Ibid., p. 42.

[58] Stalin, op. cit., p. 22.

[59] Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 24.

> of production and exchange, and only when it has completed this investigation will it be able to establish the few quite general laws which hold good for production and exchange as a whole. At the same time, it goes without saying that the laws which are valid for definite modes of production and forms of exchange also hold good for all historical periods in which these modes of production and forms of exchange prevail.[60]

In Engels' vigorous effort to destroy confidence in man's ability to construct systems and uncover eternal truths, he makes some remarkably modest claims.[61] Sovereignty of thought can't be realized in unsovereignly-thinking humans. A series of relative errors do not add up to unconditional truth. Even in inorganic sciences, Engels asserts, final truth is rare, though these are known as exact sciences. As time goes on, final and ultimate truths become remarkably rare in this field. Even mathematics is in the realm of controversy. As to the organic sciences, they are marked by "a luxuriant growth of hypotheses." In organic nature there is at least a certain regularity in the observable phenomena, but matters are obviously much worse in the historical sciences. Here knowledge is essentially relative.

> Now it is a remarkable thing that it is precisely in this sphere that we most frequently encounter truths which claim to be eternal, final and ultimate and all the rest of it. . . . This has all happened so many hundreds and thousands of times that we can only feel

---

[60] Ibid., pp. 163-64.

[61] Ibid., pp. 98-103.

> astonished that there should still be people credulous enough to believe this. . . .[62]

Truth and error have validity only in an extremely limited field. Engels then cites an example from the field of physics to show that even in this field scientists are cautious about claims of truth, always allowing for the possibility that future investigations may require a change.

> This is how things stand with final and ultimate truths in physics for example. Really scientific works therefore as a rule avoid such dogmatic and moral expressions as error and truth, while these expressions meet us everywhere in works such as the philosophy of reality. . . .[63]

If this is the case, then what is the basis for the epistemological arrogance which communism assumes? Precisely here the dialectical character of communism asserts itself. "A system of natural and historical knowledge which is all-embracing and final for all time is in contradiction to the fundamental laws of dialectical thinking. . . ."[64] In Feuerbach Engels says that truth is not a collection of dogmatic statements, but is found in the historical process. One could almost say that truth is the process.

> In this way one discards the absolute truth, unattainable by way of the positive sciences, and the collection

---

[62] Ibid., p. 100.

[63] Ibid., pp. 102-03.

[64] Ibid., p. 31.

> of their results by means of the dialectic mode of thought. With Hegel universal philosophy comes to an end, on the one hand, because he comprehended in his system its entire development on the greatest possible scale; on the other hand, because he showed us the way, even if he did not know it himself, out of this labyrinth of systems, to a real positive knowledge of the world.[65]

It is at this point above all that the concealed metaphysics, the hidden faith-judgment of communism becomes most apparent. It is one thing to operate with dialectics as a sort of hermeneutical principle which can unearth valuable insights in attempting to understand the world. It is quite another thing to allow this principle to become an infallible guide to the past and future of man's history. This becomes infinitely more dangerous when Marx, having set up the dialectical principle and given it its historical frame of reference, urges his followers to prove it by action.

> The question if objective truth is possible to human thought is not a theoretical but a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is the reality and force in his actual thoughts. The dispute as to the reality or non-reality of thought which separates itself, "the praxis," is a purely scholastic question.[66]

The mysteries of the life of society must find their solution in human practice and in concepts of this practice. It was in this context that Marx said: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change

---

[65] Engels, Feuerbach, pp. 48-49.

[66] Karl Marx, in "Appendix" to Engels' Feuerbach, dated 1845, p. 133.

it."[67] In the words of Engels:

> To carry through his world-emancipating act is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. And it is the task of scientific socialism, the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, to establish the historical conditions and, with these, the nature of this act, and thus to bring to the consciousness of the now oppressed class the conditions and nature of the act which it is its destiny to accomplish.[68]

Venable says that it is because knowledge is not divorced from action that it is possible to know with certainty the future course of history. Men, by knowing how to go about it, will produce a successful revolution. The revolution will not come mechanically without human agency but because men, knowing how, will bring it about. "It is this that Marx and Engels hold to be predictable as any event in natural science."[69] The thinking of Marxists at this point gives us no reason to underestimate the role of the dialectic. The combination of theory and practice has a close affinity to the way the Marxists resolve the problem of freedom and necessity. In the latter instance man finds freedom by submitting to what is necessary. In the former, man learns what is historically determined and, submitting, brings it about. At this point communism has frequently, and with a measure of justification, been compared with Calvin's doctrine of pre-

---

[67] Ibid., p. 130.

[68] Engels, Anti-Duehring, p. 310.

[69] Venable, op. cit., pp. 201-02.

destination. In theory determinism applies, but once the elect learn of their call they become world-movers.

The practical effect such a philosophy has had upon historic communism perhaps can be seen most clearly in the way the public and the Party are indoctrinated. A small but remarkable book taken from a Russian text on pedagogy reveals the adeptness and thoroughness with which this indoctrination is carried out. To isolate one passage:

> Every action of the greatest people of our time . . . expresses a passionate love of and an ardent devotion to the people, a relentless struggle against the enemies of the workers, and a deep conviction in the righteousness of their cause. This conviction rests on the firm scientific foundations of Marxist-Leninist science which clarifies purposes, provides arms for the struggle for every progressive cause, and colors all activity with beautiful emotions.[70]

This rigid combination of scientific certainty and holy purpose become all the more frightening because they are set in an innocuous context of methods of training children in personal morality and other educational advice which was frankly impressive in its effectiveness. The success of education in Russia is one of the generally acknowledged achievements of communism, and a great measure of that success is no doubt a result of a unified philosophy which combines knowledge with

---

[70] B. P. Yesipov and N. K. Goncharov. A pedagogical textbook translated from the Russian by George S. Counts and Nucia P. Lodge under the title, I Want to Be Like Stalin (New York: John Day, 1947), p. 43.

life in a purposeful way that is not possible to western civilization.

The same philosophy is presented, more rigidly patterned, in Communist Party instructional literature[71]--fierce in its dogmatism, but effective in offering people a challenging, one-package answer to life.

Man and the State

Democracy as we know it is plainly incompatible with the arrogant orthodoxy of communism. Anything but a monolithic society after the revolution is counter to the nature of communism. Marx and Engels spent little time worrying about what would happen after the revolution. In any case the rise of a highly centralized and totalitarian state power was more than fortuitous. Since it is at this point that some of the most significant questions should be raised regarding the communist anthropology, this chapter will conclude with a short discussion of the development of the state in communism.

Marx and Engels from the beginning openly asserted that they were advocating nothing less radical than the overthrow of all existing order. They write with prophetic zeal in concluding the Manifesto.

---

[71]Liu Shao-Chi, On Inner-Party Struggle and On The Party (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1941 and 1951).

> The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.
>
> Workingmen of all countries, unite!

Because they saw the compound character of man's self-interest they were political realists--realists at least in the sense that to them politics was basically a matter of power and not of sentiment. Whether they were consistent in this belief is a question we will have to raise later. They were irked by any proposal for effecting an ultimate change through the existing order. It was not a question of morality, but of fact and history. They were well aware of the destruction that accompanies revolution,[72] but they viewed this as history's necessary judgment upon corrupt political forms.

The state, according to Engels, is not something that has existed from all eternity, for some societies had no conception of state power. But at a certain stage of economic development the state became a necessity due to class cleavage. We are now, said Engels, approaching a stage in the development of production where the state will no longer be necessary, but will be rather a hindrance to production, and so it will fall just as inevitably as it arose. The new free society will "put the whole machinery of state where it will

---

[72]Engels to Kautsky, 1882, Correspondence, p. 399.

then belong: into the Museum of Antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe."[73] What is the basis for believing that the state will disappear? Engels said that the state is a repressive force, but that when class antagonism is removed it becomes representative of society as a whole and so makes itself superfluous. At the revolution the proletariat will seize the state power and transform the means of production into state property. In doing so the proletariat ceases being the proletariat, and this first act by which class domination is ended is at the same time its last act as a state. "The state is not 'abolished,' it withers away."[74]

In 1852 Marx wrote:

> Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular, historic phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.[75]

It was action to bring about the revolution that really concerned Marx and Engels. They cared little about discussing

---

[73]Friedrich Engels in The State and Revolution, by V. I. Lenin (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951), p. 26.

[74]Engels, Anti-Duehring, pp. 306-07.

[75]Marx to Wedemeyer, 1852, Correspondence, p. 57.

what would happen afterwards except to say that the state would disappear.

> The whole talk about the state should be dropped. . . . As, therefore, the "state" is only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, in order to hold down one's adversaries by force, it is pure nonsense to talk of a "free people's state"; so long as the proletariat still uses the state, it does not use it in the interest of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist.[76]

It is of importance to indicate what development of thought there might have been in Marx and Engels regarding the role of the proletariat over against the state. In the Manifesto reference is merely made to the proletariat seizing power, but no indication is given as to just how they shall go about using that power. This is the general rule in all of the writings of Marx and Engels. However in a preface to the Manifesto dated 1888 Engels wrote:

> The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded to-day. In view of the gigantic strides of modern industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organization of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution 1871, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details become anti-

---

[76] Engels to Bebel, 1875, Ibid., pp. 336-37.

quated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.'

There is at least the realization that control and operation of state power is no simple chore. In a letter to Bebel dated 1891 Engels writes that the time has come to recruit educated people and trained technicians so that entry into power will be as smooth as possible. "If, on the other hand, a war brings us to power prematurely, the technicians will be our chief enemies; . . . and we shall have to use terror against them. . . ."[77] Lenin quotes both Marx and Engels to prove that liberation is impossible without a violent revolution and destruction of the existing state power.[78] Conversely, Hunt points out that while Marx never abandoned his idea of revolution, later on he did think more in terms of a long process of educating people in the socialist doctrine, and on several occasions he and Engels admitted the possibility that the transition to socialism might be accomplished without revolution at all in certain countries.[79]

Did Lenin's subsequent emphasis upon the role of the disciplined party and his great preoccupation with problems of dictatorship and power represent a legitimate and scientific

---

[77]Engels to Bebel, 1891, Ibid., P. 493.

[78]Lenin, The State and Revolution, pp. 11ff.

[79]R. N. Carew Hunt, The Theory and Practice of Communism (New York: MacMillan, 1952), pp. 69-70.

extension of Marx? If so then Lenin was merely fulfilling Marx's own view that the practical application of Marxist principles should be determined by the historical conditions; then he was proving the truth by action, as Marx advocated. Or was the extraordinary energy and attention which he gave to the mechanics of handling power a profound confusion of Marx's own incompletely developed political ideas?[80]

In either case it is probably true, as Berdyaev maintains, that Lenin was more a theoretician of revolution than a theoretician of Marxism.[81] To Lenin Marxism was above all the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat, only in contrast to the mensheviks he had no faith in a prophetic majority, but in a tightly-knit and highly disciplined vanguard. Under bolshevism the proletariat ceased to be an empirical reality, instead the thought and power of a relatively tiny minority was all that mattered.[82] Hence the will of the people dare never be differentiated from the will of the party.[83] Bolshevists openly acknowledge that in the first phase of communism there is injustice and inequality, but by the very nature of the state, exploitation of man by man is impossible

---

[80] W. W. Rostow, The Dynamics of Soviet Society (New York: The New American Library, 1954), p. 30.

[81] Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 117.

[82] Ibid., pp. 119, 106.

[83] Liu Shao-Chi, On The Party, p. 51

because the means of production are under social control.[84]

> Here we meet with a very interesting phenomenon. Lenin did not believe in man. He recognized in him no sort of inward principle; he did not believe in spirit and the freedom of the spirit, but he had a boundless faith in the social regimentation of man. He believed that a compulsory social organization could create any sort of new man you like, for instance, a completely social man who would no longer need the use of force. Marx believed the same thing, that the new man could be manufactured in factories.[85]

---

[84] Lenin, op. cit., p. 148.

[85] Berdyaev, op. cit., pp. 127-28.

CHAPTER III

AN EVALUATION

A disturbing feature about the atheistic materialism of communism is that it is more avidly religious than the thinking of the Western world, and that in many respects communists are a good deal less materialistic than "spiritual-minded" Westerners. The reason for this is that although atheism and materialism are proper predications of communism, they are also, by themselves, misleading. Religious naturalism would in many ways be a more accurate description. "The mission of the proletariat is an article of faith. Marxism is not only a science and politics; it is also a faith; a religion."[1] In an article on "The Marxist Heresy--A Theological Evaluation,"[2] Jaroslav Pelikan observes that the ambiguous character of the communist philosophy involves many subtle dangers in formulating a distinctively Christian answer. One must discover both its Christian origins as well as its perversions. It is quite possible, says Pelikan, to reject communism for supposedly Christian reasons when the real motives are entirely differ-

---

[1]Nicolas Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism (London: Geoffry Bles, 1937), p. 100.

[2]Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Marxist Heresy--A Theological Evaluation," Religion in Life, XIX (Summer, 1950), 356-66.

ent. "Since Marxism has managed to preserve many of the emphases that sections of Christendom have neglected, much of the opposition to Marxism in Christian circles is not Christian at all."[3] This chapter will list without much elaboration what this writer believes to be important affinities between the Christian faith and communism, all of which have a direct bearing upon man's nature and his destiny. The writer will also indicate a few of the perversions, and conclude with a Christian answer.

Affinities

1. One of the deepest similarities between the two faiths is the thorough sense of evil found in both. Self-interest in Marxism has a corruptive character that enshrouds every facet of man's life, even his finest achievements. This evil is corporate and compound so that man cannot possibly avoid a deep-seated bias in his thinking, and he is so involved that he has no hope of extricating himself. This leads Marxists to a kind of political realism which also has much in common with Christian political realism.

2. Communism has a keen sense both of moral indignation at injustice and of judgment hovering upon all existing social forms.

---

[3] Ibid., p. 357.

3. It has an acute awareness that if evil is to be overcome the cure must be total and radical. Its "clear-sightedness with regard to the ineffectiveness of a purely humanitarian religion is very remarkable. . . ."[4] It also has an abhorrence of legalism. No real solution can be found on the basis of simple morality. There must be a tremendous struggle--a struggle that involves a dying and a rising.

4. It has a prophetic vision of history. History has meaning, and that involves a messianic purpose and a messianic people.

5. It knows that man is a religious creature. As a religious creature he needs above all else a faith to which he can commit his life. The unification of thought and deed in the communist philosophy offers such a faith. Common and menial labor is ennobled. Man finds his freedom in obedience and dedication.

Perversions

1. The communist belief in man's biological evolution with labor as a determining factor is one which the Christian faith must reject.

2. The Marxist belief that the essence of evil is greed must also be rejected. The affinity between Marxism and

---

[4]Austin Lewis, in "Introduction" to Feuerbach, by Friedrich Engels (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1903), p. 16.

Christianity at this point is broken with the Marxist assumption that the ultimate causal factor behind man's corruption is an economic one. It can only be viewed as an inadequate explanation of, for example, the life of Christ and the rise of Christianity. Furthermore, it fails to see the equally corruptive character of factors such as power or sex. Marx saw the evil in the centralization of power, but only in so far as it had to do with capitalistic accumulation,[5] and here he proved to be a poor prophet. Nor does Marxism explain why the pleasures of a dissolute life can tempt men to ignore (relatively) economic considerations. In addition there is a failure to see sin as guilt.

3. The belief that evil can be used to overcome evil runs directly counter to the Christian faith. This is closely related to the communist failure to view sin as guilt, and to the fact that the stages of man's "fall" are simultaneously deplored and glorified. The hope that economic determinism will spur the proletariat to redemptive action is a radical, but creaturely, faith. Through this faith Marxists find meaning in history, but history is incapable of producing that meaning, for the faith is based upon what finally turns out to be an erroneous assessment of human nature.

4. Communism's epistemological pride is not acceptable.

---

[5] Karl Marx, Capital (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), p. 722.

What Marxists here see so clearly in others--ideological bias and great limitations of understanding--they fail to see in themselves. Christians cannot accept the identity with or close affinity to reality with which Marxists honor the dialectic. Engels takes Hegel to task because he saw his dialectical process coming to an end,[6] but the same criticism can be levelled at communism. Venable's defense at this point is that the dialectical process for Marx and Engels was materialistic, not idealistic as with Hegel, and so has no eternal reality beyond empirical facts.[7] But this is too kind an appraisal in the light of Engels' description of dialectics in Anti-Duehring[8] and Lenin's assertion that "dialectics is the study of the contradiction within the very essence of things."[9] A Christian may grant the possibility that the dialectic corresponds to some extent to the realities of history in describing and even predicting its organization, but it cannot deal in ultimate judgment or prophecy regarding man's nature. Engels was ironically prophetic himself when he said:

> People who boasted that they had made a revolution have

---

[6]Friedrich Engels, Feuerbach (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1903), pp. 44-48.

[7]Vernon Venable, Human Nature: The Marxian View (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 173.

[8]Friedrich Engels, Herr Eugen Duehring's Revolution in Science (New York: International Publishers, 1939), pp. 17, 19, 29-31.

[9]Joseph Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 11.

always seen the next day that they had no idea what they were doing, that the revolution made did not in the least resemble the one they would have liked to make. That is what Hegel calls the irony of history, an irony which few historic personalities escape.[10]

5. In communism man's religious nature is reckoned with, but certainly not in its true proportions. The materialism and determinism and the relative disregard of the individual as a person all come into play here.

The Christian Alternative

In the above criticisms the writer tried to limit himself to ones which he considered both important and related to the religious character of communism. But in the final analysis even these are largely irrelevant in the eyes of a convinced Marxist. Their value lies in understanding communism rather than in polemical use. Venable says that although history has shown that, temporarily speaking, Marx and Engels underestimated the staying powers of capitalism, "it is nevertheless genuinely doubtful whether they would be confounded by the present."[11] He also adds that only history will be able to prove whether "Marxian agency can meet its

---

[10] Friedrich Engels to Zasulich, 1885, in Correspondence, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York: International Publishers, n.d.), pp. 437-38.

[11] Venable, op. cit., pp. 181-82.

own decisive standard of 'the deed,'" but when the whole content of Marxism is examined, "no particular theoretical inconsistency stands out, is the conclusion, I believe, that must here be drawn."[12] A Roman Catholic author writes that dialectics occupies the position reserved to metaphysics in other systems, and because there is this fundamental opposition at the outset, communists have a system "which to us is completely inconceivable and, for sound philosophy, is not demonstrable. But for that very reason that system cannot be refuted, either."[13]

Secondly, what is also a matter of great importance in proposing a Christian alternative to communism is an honest admission of the deserved judgment which it has inflicted upon the Church. Since Christianity is more than the body of Christ, there is a large measure of truth in the charges of hypocrisy and self-interest which Marxists have levelled against Christendom. Pagans have often seen what Christians were unwilling to admit. Turning God into a reflection of self-interest is an incessant attempt of the flesh, a fact which demands the radical surgery of daily contrition and repentance. When Marxists call attention to that flesh, it is the painful but proper procedure for the Church to first ac-

---

[12] Ibid., p. 203.

[13] Gedeone Peterffy and others, The Philosophy of Communism (New York: Fordham University Press, 1952), pp. 236-37.

knowledge this by repenting.

> In revolution judgment is passed upon the evil forces which have brought about injustice, but the forces which judge, themselves create evil; in revolution good itself is realized by forces of evil, since forces of good were powerless to realize their good in history. And revolutions in Christian history have always been a judgment upon historical Christianity, upon Christians, upon their betrayal of the Christian covenant, upon their distortion of Christianity. For Christians especially, revolution has a meaning and they, above all, must understand it. It is a challenge to Christians and a reminder that they have not made justice a fact of experience.[14]

In presenting itself as an alternative to Marxist philosophy the Christian faith must meet communism where it should be met--on religious grounds. Here the Church may show the realism of its revelation.

The Christian always views man as he stands in relation to God. This is a faith-judgment. For this communism has substituted an alternate faith-judgment, the belief that man is his own sovereign, and in doing so communism betrays an underlying affinity with the naturalism that is fashionable in much of the Western world today. While this is ostensibly a noble and elevating view of man, the Christian faith judges it to be both erroneous and degrading. According to this view man is finally little more than a sophisticated beast, born to be pushed around for a brief while by forces and circumstances over which he has virtually no control. The Chris-

---

[14]Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 132.

tian faith is not only realistic in judging man's pretended sovereignty as idolatry, but it elevates man above the despair of temporality and evil by regarding him as a special creation, fashioned in the image of God, created and redeemed for eternal life with God.

For realism in dealing with sin Christianity is willing to go one decisive step farther than Marxism. Marxists have an <u>almost</u> universal view of sin, and man's nature is <u>almost</u> beyond hope of self-assistance. But for them the evil is ultimately traceable to one corner of life, and finally, too, the power of holiness will triumph in the proletariat and its righteousness. The Christian faith sees evil in history where Marxists can only blindly hope there is no evil. The Church has a really universal view of sin, one which allows even <u>itself</u> to be judged. This Marxism cannot admit. Even more, the Church and all within can confess <u>guilt</u>, and when they do so honestly they unearth the pretensions of Marxism. The glorification of man is shattered in the face of repentance.

Ironically the Christian faith can find common ground for speaking to Marxism in their materialism. For Christians, too, matter matters. "Christianity is the most materialistic of the world's religions," Archbishop Temple is supposed to have said. From the creation to the resurrection the Christian faith takes matter into account, and this is true in a crucial way with the incarnation of Christ. This is the

Christian doctrine of "historical materialism"--empirically real and more promising than Marx or anyone could have dreamed. If the Christian faith has taken a more daring step than Marxism in its doctrine of sin, then in the incarnation its cure is equally radical. The incarnation tells a revolutionary tale both in judgment and redemption. It speaks more sharply in judgment because it bares the ideological bias of unbelief--a bias resting on man's determination not to find guilt in himself and not to repent. It speaks the judgment "that the Light has come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil."

> In Marxism, a realistic appraisal of man has become a cynical refusal to recognize holiness even in that one place where it has appeared in history, coupled with an idolatrous supposition of holiness in a particular class. In Christianity, on the other hand, the recognition of the holiness that was in Christ leads to the repudiation of all the pretended holiness with which men have clothed themselves.[15]

Again, the incarnation speaks a revolutionary word of redemption and that word is the word of the cross--that God and not man has upset the reign of evil and that he has done so by letting evil men crucify him. Instead of men taking the Kingdom by violence, God offers it to them as a gift through forgiveness and love.

---

[15]Pelikan, op. cit., p. 361.

> No nation, no class, no church can ever cause the Kingdom of God to come. For the Kingdom is a gift, which is given to us of the Father's good pleasure. It cannot be earned, and it does not come by observation. Thus the entire initiative and the entire execution of the Kingdom is God's. The Kingdom of God is the reign of God. And all of this is due to his grace and good favor toward men in Christ, through whom God has set in motion a new age. Men could not be saved, Paradise could not be restored if the world had been left in the tyranny of this aeon. Marxism does not take its own view of man seriously enough when it supposes that a mere change in the class structure will change man's will to power. That cannot be changed except by the grace of God.
>
> In opposing the Marxist Utopia, then, Christianity does not follow the usual course of ridiculing it as a castle in the air. On the contrary, Christianity alone is capable of coming to terms with the Marxist view of Utopia; for it criticizes that view from within the context of a religious faith, the same religious faith from which Marxism took much of its philosophy. The Christian answer to the Marxist Utopia is the Christian trust in divine grace as the sole means for the redemption and restoration of man and the world.[16]

God has wrought the revolution on the cross in His Son. It was a revolution of struggle, but that struggle has already been waged and won. Christ in His life and death defeated Satan and in His resurrection made it known. The Christian faith also declares that God is seeking to extend this victory by offering it to people, offering to enter their hearts and repeat the victory of His Son.

Having said this, the Christian faith has entered an area of fatal weakness for Marxism. It has no answer for death. Christianity proclaims that answer, and it does so

---

[16] Ibid., p. 360.

without losing its concern for the world that stands in judgment. In fact it is precisely in such a world that Christians are committed to live out their renewal and with a concern that reflects the gift they have been given. It is on this level that Christianity can refute communism, by the lives of transformed human natures.

> The battle between Christianity and the Marxist heresy will finally be won or lost in the lives and tasks of Christian people. This means that the most important step in the development of a Christian strategy against Marxism is a recovery of the sense of Christian vocation.[17]

---

[17] Ibid., p. 365.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berdyaev, Nicolas. The Origin of Russian Communism. London: Geoffry Bles, 1937.

Bober, Mandell Morton. Karl Marx's Interpretation of History. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927.

Burns, Emile. What is Marxism? Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945.

Hunt, R. N. Carew. The Theory and Practice of Communism. New York: MacMillan, 1952.

Engels, Friedrich. Herr Eugen Duehring's Revolution in Science. New York: International Publishers, 1939.

-----. Socialism, Utopian and Scientific. New York: International Publishers, 1935.

Marx, Karl. Capital. New York: Random House, 1906.

-----, and Friedrich Engels. Communist Manifesto. New York: International Publishers, 1948.

-----, and Friedrich Engels. Correspondence. New York: International Publishers, n.d.

-----. In the New York Tribune, August 8, 1853. Quoted in Handbook of Marxism. Edited by Emile Burns. New York: Random House, n.d.

-----. The Poverty of Philosophy. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, n.d.

La Pira, Giorgio, and Others. The Philosophy of Communism. New York: Fordham University Press, 1952.

Lenin, V. I. The State and Revolution. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951.

Liu Shao-Chi. On Inner-Party Struggle. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1941.

-----. On The Party. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1951.

Pares, Bernard. Russia. New York: The New American Library, 1949.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. "The Marxist Heresy--A Theological Evaluation," Religion in Life, XIX (Summer, 1950), 356-65.

Rostow, W. W. The Dynamics of Soviet Society. New York: The New American Library, 1954.

Stalin, Joseph. Dialectical and Historical Materialism. New York: International Publishers, 1940.

Venable, Vernon. Human Nature: The Marxian View. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946.

Yesipov, B. P., and N. K. Goncharov. A pedagogical textbook translated from the Russian by George S. Counts and Nucia P. Lodge under the title, I Want to Be Like Stalin. New York: John Day, 1947.