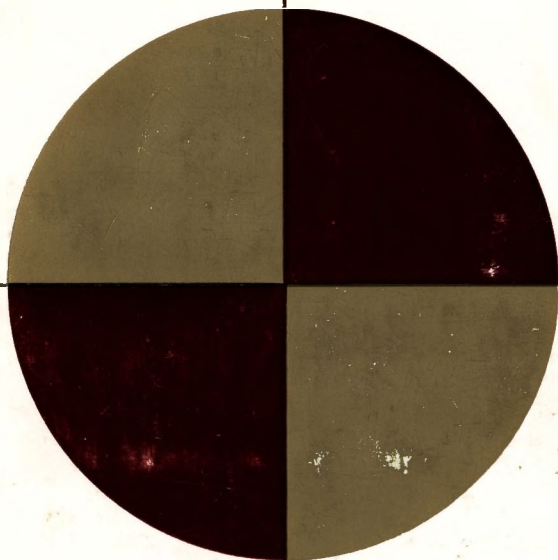


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Dialogue of  
CHRISTIANITY &  
MARXISM



JAMES Edited by  
KLUGMANN

DIALOGUE OF  
CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM

edited by  
JAMES KLUGMANN

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LAWRENCE AND WISHART  
LONDON

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## PREFACE

**I**N March 1966 there was published in *Marxism Today* an article by Dr. John Lewis entitled "Dialogue between Christianity and Marxism".

In preceding years "the dialogue", as it had come to be known, had developed widely on the European Continent, and in areas like Latin America. In a number of different ways it was spreading to Britain where, it should be said, discussion and common action between Christians and Marxists were by no means new.

The Editorial Board of *Marxism Today*, wishing to further the dialogue, sent Dr. Lewis' article to a number of Christians of different denominations, inviting them to join in the discussion. To our extreme pleasure, the invitation met with a warm response, some accepting, others, too busy, wishing us well, and no-one at all opposing or rejecting.

Over the next eighteen months we printed a dozen contributions, nine by Christians and three by Marxists, and then asked Dr. Lewis not to close the discussion, nor even to reply to it (for this would in a sense have gone counter to the extending dialogue) but to give his personal views on the discussion to date.

All the contributions received were printed as received, uncut, unedited. As they were printed in *Marxism Today*, so they are reprinted in this volume.

During this whole period the Dialogue was proceeding in many different forms and many different places—in the Pierre

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Teilhard de Chardin Association, in the Marx Memorial Library, in discussion between Communists and Quakers, in University societies, in the most diverse places from trade unions to training colleges, from Catholic Seminaries to Communist Party Branches.

The *Marxism Today* contributions helped to promote the dialogue and aroused considerable interest. We began to receive requests for the organisation of a spoken dialogue on a national level and, at the end of 1966, made approaches to this end to the International Committee of the British Council of Churches who welcomed and accepted the proposal.

And so, after considerable discussion, a fifteen-a-side discussion meeting was prepared (our Christian friends eventually were to exceed their quota), to be held on October 6th-8th, 1967, at that most suitable of settings, the Royal Foundation of St. Katherine of Stepney, for so many years the home of Father Groser and his work.

The discussions were held under the general title of "What Sort of Revolution", with theoretical, philosophical-theological debate on "Man and His Place in Society"—and more practical sessions on "Peace", on "Poverty and Justice", on "Change in British Society" and on "The Future of the Dialogue".

Attendance was full, the discussions informal but intense, polemical but positive, the first report of the meeting well received in the Press.

Once again the Dialogue seemed to gain new impetus, to spread wider and deeper.

Out of all the diversity of meetings and discussions that have thus far taken place, certain principles of dialogue (or at least conditions for successful dialogue) seem to be emerging.

The first perhaps is sincerity, mutual respect, the firm resolve in no way to cloak or conceal deep differences between our respective approaches.

When I—an atheist and materialist—discuss with a

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Christian, the last thing that we mutually wish to conceal is *his* belief or *my* unbelief in God. We enter the Dialogue as Christian or Marxist, each of course ready to listen and learn, but each believing in the superiority of his own approach.

It is this that makes the Dialogue a dialogue, and not a manoeuvre nor a search for an impossible synthesis.

But that said, we go into discussion *looking for common ground*.

During the Dialogue in Britain to date all seem to have agreed that Christians and Marxists can and must make common efforts now for peace, against racialism, against poverty at home and abroad.

But dialogue goes deeper. Common ground, it would seem, can extend to our concern for man, our desire to improve and radically change the world, to our desire for a world where all individual human beings can freely develop their many-sided talents, to the fact that individual man develops as part of society, of the community, and that, therefore, the form of society in which he lives is of vital concern to him. There is much common ground in our mutual visions of a world of brotherhood without barriers of class or race or nation, a world where man is no longer the enemy of man, where exploitation of man by man is ended.

But how to achieve such a society, such a world? What is meant by revolution? What of freedom? Can love be combined with hatred? Is violence necessary for social change? Can it be justified? Can wars ever be just? Can men be truly human, with or without a belief in God? Many, many questions recur. This is the very stuff of dialogue!

The Dialogue is on—and we deeply welcome it. But only a few, a very few, have so far joined in it. It is only beginning.

We offer these essays, that played a certain part in developing the Dialogue, as a modest contribution towards its future extension. Other books are in preparation. The more the better.

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Together Marxists and Christians form no small part of the world community.

And the world of the bomb, the world where the very science that can end for ever material misery can, misused and abused, end the world; where amidst plenty poverty still grows and hunger stalks amidst surplus—that world shouts aloud for common Christian and Marxist action, and prolonged and patient search for common ground.

JAMES KLUGMANN

*November 6th, 1967*



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*(Dr. John Lewis, Marxist writer and lecturer, is lecturer in philosophy at Morley College, London)*

AT Salzburg in May 1965 ten Marxists from Italy, France, Yugoslavia, Belgium and Austria entered into dialogue or debate with a considerable number of Christian theologians, philosophers and churchmen. In three days of talks and discussions, lasting from morning until late at night, the relations of Marxism and Christianity were frankly and temperately explored. Professor Hollitscher reporting on the conference says that the representatives of religion were clearly unprepared for the freedom, the tact and the tolerance displayed by their Marxist opponents.

In this country it is by no means uncommon for Marxists to be invited to discuss their beliefs with Christian ministers of many denominations—Catholic, Methodist and Anglican—at public meeting or religious assembly. There is a reason for this. A sharp turn has taken place in the attitude of Christians to Communism. The growing prosperity and internal stability of the socialist countries, the existence of powerful Communist Parties in Italy and France, the realisation that the great evils of poverty and social degradation appear to concern Socialists more than Christians today, have led to a retreat from the former position, in which religious leaders, Liberals, Social Democrats and the political forces of the West, side by side with the Vatican, united to oppose the common menace—

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Pope Pius XII even going so far as to forbid Catholics to join the Communist Party and to declare anyone professing or defending its tenets liable to excommunication. His crusade was in vain. More than a quarter of the Italian electorate still vote for the Communist Party, including many thousands of Catholics.

The whole situation has now changed both on the Continent and here. Religious leaders are most anxious for the Church to take up a non-aligned position in world affairs, and above all to be allowed to discover a sense of social progress and become an instrument of change, playing its full part in the battle for human freedom and social justice.

The old religious picture of this world as a "vale of tears" which has underpinned Conservative political forces for so long, is to disappear, to be replaced with the call for positive social action.

One distinguished theologian has declared that "Marxism is not a vulgar form of materialism, and is not a denial but an expression of humanism. This world outlook," he declares, "cannot be countered by polemics. It must be deeply studied so that a dialogue with Marxism may take place".<sup>1</sup>

Religious leaders in this country have moved even closer, for we have here a Christian Socialist tradition going back to Frederick Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Scott Holland, Conrad Noel and Bishop Gore; and the radical movements have never been anti-clerical as they have been in France and Italy, where the Church has entered the political field openly to oppose Liberalism and had launched its own political organisations and parties. Nor has it been confronted as the Russian socialists were with a corrupt Church committed to the maintenance of autocracy and actively controlled by a secular Procurator.

Today in France, Italy and Britain the opportunity has come

<sup>1</sup> *World Marxist Review*—Statement by Father Guerva Banyres.

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for a continuance and development of Thorez' historic policy of "the outstretched hand". The Italian C.P. leader, Luigi Longo, declares:

We Communists have always rejected anti-clericalism. . . . Our aim being to unite all working people in the common struggle for the democratic renovation of Italian Society. . . . We believe that honest religious consciousness can make a contribution.

In France the worker-priest movement is to be re-established, though it is to be more strictly controlled than before. This movement provides most remarkable evidence for the new rapprochement. In 1944 some hundred priests were working full time in industry in an attempt to revolutionise the Church's relationship to the industrial workers and to heal the breach between them. Strongly supported by the Dominican Order they soon found themselves sharing in the trade union struggle and in the fight for peace. They fully participated in the World Peace Movement demonstrations of 1948, and two of them were arrested in 1952 in the demonstrations against the new N.A.T.O. Commander-in-Chief, General Ridgway. The priests themselves in many cases not only became closely identified with the workers' movement, but began to question the rules of the priestly life. The Vatican intervened to the deep sorrow of thousands of forward-looking Catholics and the experiment was brought to an end. So it was intended; but following the Vatican Council the effort is to be revived on a new basis, the Conciliar document on the Church in the Modern World arguing forcefully that the Church should become an instrument of change.

"Sweeping social changes," it says, "will have to be effected . . . . Every form of discrimination, whether political, social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, social status, tribe, caste, colour or religion, is therefore to be condemned and progressively eliminated".

The Salzburg Dialogue was a clear expression of the new

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spirit, but at the same time revealed the direction in which the convergence of Church and Party cannot and should not be pursued. There was, on the one hand, a tendency to bring out and emphasise the philosophical differences, which of course are fundamental. In so far as this was done, the two sides drew apart. Father Gustav Wetter of Rome, for instance, who has written a scholarly and fair-minded book on Dialectical Materialism, voted against the resolution passed at the conclusion of the conference, which declared that the dialogue had been fruitful and should be extended. But, on the other hand, in so far as their differences were fully recognised, and the issue of participation in a common struggle for human betterment was emphasised, the two sides drew together. Professor Reding, who had been associated with the worker-priest movement and had asserted that the class struggle was fully justified and so far from being artificially provoked arose from contradictions which existed long before the days of Marx, urged that a dialogue between Christianity and Marxism was essential. His position made it abundantly clear that he desired to see the Church released from its association with capitalism.

One of the French Communists, Roger Garaudy, said that Communism was destined to accomplish in a secular way what Marx himself had called "the human foundations of Christianity". He struck a new note when he said that religion was not merely the "opium of the people", nor did it everywhere and at all times direct men from action or from struggle. Christian ideas could help to stimulate believers to action. He again stressed the great change now coming over the Church in the increasing importance attaching to man's earthly existence. It is this that opens new prospects for joint struggle and joint effort.

Other speakers made it clear that the concept of coexistence as applied to relations between states cannot be extended to relations between opposing ideologies. It is not compromise in the sphere of philosophies that is sought but unity in the

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practical effort to solve the social problems on which the future of man depends. Here is the common ground on which Christians and Communists can meet for joint action. We can unite in the struggle for peace, an end to hunger, social justice and well-being worthy of man. "We ourselves", said Dr. Mario Gozzini of Florence, "are interested in building socialism on the solid foundations of freedom and democracy." That should satisfy any demands made by Christianity, and provides much common ground. Even so "We do not ask the Church to build socialism. We ask it to grant Catholicism the freedom to work for socialism."

The new phase in the relationship between Marxism and the Church has therefore two sides: While the Church is abandoning her crusade against Communism, Marxism has recognised the folly of the anti-God campaign.

The Church knows that excommunication and Papal encyclicals have proved utterly useless. Communism is a fact. It is viable, stable, succeeding. It has come to stay. To take up an intransigent attitude means the erosion of Christianity, the discounting of authority, the decline of its influence. The threat to launch the thunderbolts of Jove recoils in ridicule if the heavens remain serene.

Communism has also come to realise that to demolish the philosophical bases of Christian theology makes little difference to Christianity, which, like all religion, is not an edifice built on a rational theoretical foundation but an institution brought into being by social and psychological needs. At the Salzburg Conference Professor Bosniak of Yugoslavia asked "Why people in so many different periods in history have experienced the need to believe in God." Marx never for a moment countenanced an all-out attack on religion. When he went to Cologne to edit the *Rheinische Zeitung* he vigorously repudiated the policy of his Berlin friends, the young Hegelians, who had launched a vigorous campaign for atheism. "I asked them," Marx wrote, "to criticise religion by criticising political conditions rather than the other way about, because religion, quite

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empty in itself, lives from earth and not from heaven and will disappear on its own once the inverted reality whose theory is repression is dissolved".<sup>1</sup> If they want to criticise religion let them do it through the criticism of political conditions rather than criticise political conditions through the criticism of religion; and let them cease playing about with the label "atheism"—behaving "like children who tell everyone they are not afraid of the bogeyman".<sup>2</sup>

The French Marxist, Gilbert Mury, follows Marx when he says that "Taking a materialist view of history, the Marxists recognise that Christianity will not vanish into thin air. Conditions must be created for the evolution of a human being who will live in a just world, and as a result of the realisation of man's aspirations, will free himself from religion".<sup>3</sup>

Nor does this mean that the day after the red flag is sent up over the Parliament buildings the Church falls in ruins. A classless society is not built in a day. As long as sacrifices are demanded to carry through modernisation, as long as threats of intervention drain away resources and make an abnormal degree of discipline and precautions against subversion necessary, so long will Marx's conditions for the disappearance of religion remain unfulfilled.

The Poles know only too well that the Church has not been conjured out of existence by Dialectical Materialism. It remains—popular, strongly supported by the Polish people, well organised, exercising authority. And it cannot be suppressed.

Religion is part of the superstructure, which does not mean (as opponents of Marxism think it means) that it is a mere vapour and ineffectual froth thrown up by the economic bases. The superstructure is the material, institutional, political, legal, military and ideological support of the social system. It is powerful, dangerous, effective. It defends and it attacks. The Church is a great institution, with a complex hierarchical

<sup>1</sup> Marx to Ruge: November 1849.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *World Marxist Review*—August 1965.

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organisation, great financial resources, magnificent buildings, a great art, a rich cultural heritage, numerous and disciplined bodies of men—the Orders, the priesthood. It is an institution with its own philosophy, its own ethics; often its own political parties. There is nothing derogatory in the Marxist premise that religion is both an ideology and a vital part of the superstructure of capitalism. Every social concept, Marxism included, reflects, and powerfully affects, actual social conditions.

But this implies a change in the Church itself when society enters a period of radical transition. At first the Church is mobilised as a counter-revolutionary force. The signs that this position is being abandoned, or, at the least, that it gives rise to grave doubts, reflects the growing strength and the consolidation of the socialist world. There are signs that the more alert and far-seeing Church leaders are realising that persistence in such a policy may prove fatal, that the Church remains a negative and passive force at its peril. In the fight for peace and progress they may be called upon to play an active role, if only to ensure their own survival.

Two qualifications: Do not let us suppose that the arrest of the abortive anti-Communist crusade and the cautious if significant moves towards some kind of understanding with both the Polish and Hungarian Governments mean that reactionary powers and policies have been overcome. Paul VI is not Pope John. Cardinal Ottaviani, the arch-reactionary of the curia, who calls himself "the old policeman", could reassert his influence at any time, as Father Arriape, the head of the Jesuits, has already done, in spite of the energetic protests of the progressive Dutch Jesuits—who refuse to be put down. And if leading churchmen see the danger signals and respond do not let us imagine that the parish priests are very different from what they always were—with notable exceptions—or that the churchgoing faithful are particularly enlightened. But, as Galileo said when Cardinal Bellarmine told him to say that the earth was immovable, "*Eppur si muove*" (Nevertheless it

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does move) and rank and file Christians cannot but be aware of it, and must, in the long run, come to terms with changing conditions.

Religion in England pursues its own compromising, British way, showing far less consistency than we find on the Continent, and some surprising, if erratic, enthusiasms for socialism. In the first place we are not anti-clerical, as the French and Italians are still, because earnest Christians turn up in all political parties and churchmen have not had to emphasise their separateness. Instead of banding together in one party, members of the various churches are found in all: and this has proved an effective way of protecting religious interests.

Even more significant is the important tradition of the Christian social conscience. Kingsley proclaimed himself a Chartist. Archbishop Temple was for seven years a paid-up member of the Labour Party. Tawney, author of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, a very Marxist-slanted work, was a staunch Anglican. We still remember Conrad Noel in full canonicals with processional cross in the May Day Parade, and Father Groser was beloved by the whole East End of London. Maurice, Toynbee, Scott Holland and Gore were the men who were saying "Christianity is the religion of which Socialism is the practice." The High Anglicans in particular were strongly conscious of the Christian challenge to the acquisitive society. There was always a vocal and courageous protest from deeply respected religious leaders—Anglican and Free Church—against the neglect or failure of the political parties to cope with the social evils of the century: poverty, hunger, disease and unemployment. This undoubtedly softened the resistance to socialist ideas, and lessened the hostility of Socialism to the Church. The Marxist could not say that its adherents were always supporters of reaction when he saw Temple and other bishops taking up the miners' cause during the General Strike of 1926. It is not entirely true to describe the Church of England as the Tory Party at prayer.

This recognition of the Christian challenge to capitalist



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society reflects a powerful tradition in this country, that has manifested itself in successive decades in one form or another and has never been without influence. It is powerful today in many directions: both theological and social. Here the British movement, unlike the Continental Catholic change of direction, is theologically as well as socially progressive.

We begin with the rediscovery of the humanism of Jesus the carpenter and the steady erosion of the mythical and supernatural from His life<sup>1</sup>—the birth story, the miracle, the resurrection. This has been proceeding for over fifty years *within* the Church. Among its protagonists have been the Bishop of Birmingham and members of the Modern Churchman's Conference as well as many New Testament scholars. Here the protest has been against the tendency of the Church to allow the other-worldly aspects of its teaching about Jesus to submerge the secular content of His message about human life. This return to the historic figure brings into prominence the attack on riches, the contempt for ritualistic and merely external religious practices, in rediscovery of a revolutionary if Utopian element in the Gospels.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat  
And exalted the humble and meek.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things  
And the rich he hath sent empty away.

This recognition of fierce antagonism not to "the World" as the flesh and blood life of man, but as the corrupt society of first-century Palestine with its cruel exploitation of the poor, has been recently much reinforced by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, bearing witness to a Puritan revolt against the Hasmonean dynasty and their Roman successors, a strong, ethical, resistance movement, religious but against the Priesthood, out of which Christianity emerged.

<sup>1</sup> Strongly supported by the influential and otherwise orthodox German theologian, Bultmann.

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The theologians' revolution has also taken the form of an attack on Supernaturalism and on organised Christianity as representing an other-worldly and mystical faith. One vigorous exponent of secularised Christianity—and incidentally a loyal member of the Church—writes “the best thing about being a Christian at the moment is that organised Christianity has collapsed”.<sup>1</sup> Werner Pele says “When we use the word ‘God’ we are talking about something which no longer connects with anything in most people’s life.”

Nicholas Mosley in his *Experience and Religion* puts on one side the cynics and the bigots who see only man’s helplessness, who think social effort fatuous, ludicrous and unspiritual, and on the other the truly religious people who are those who have help to offer, who face the urgent issues of our time, looking to the evidence, not to rules and projections of our own mental condition. Those who really belong to the new age of enquiry, ready to test all things.

And so we come to the Bishop of Woolwich and his near neighbour the Bishop of Southwark—to what is called South Bank Christianity. If it is pointed out that John Robinson’s theology, which equates God with “the ground of our being”, and tries to explain orthodox phrases, concepts and rituals as in some way a Christian manifestation of this “ground”, has most dubious philosophical justification and seems sadly confused, one cannot but agree, and at the same time say emphatically that this is simply not the point. Religion is never at any time or in any place the expression of a purely philosophical belief. It is the recognition of the *sacred*, either in the “numinous” or the mystical or the sacramental on the one hand, or in the demands which the needs of our fellow men present to our impulse to pity and fellowship on the other. The new theology holds, with the distinguished Cambridge professor of Dogmatic Theology, John Oman, that “the test of a true faith is the extent to which religion is secular”.

<sup>1</sup> Monica Furlong in *The Guardian*.

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If that seems the very extinction of what we call religion, the Bishop and the professor would reply: That depends on the force of the moral obligation to stand by your brother, on how far the obligation is sacred in the sense of being absolute. And they would both support their contention by exhaustive references to the teaching of Jesus.

The philosophical justification, or even the theology, does not matter at all. The enormous volume of Christian response to *Honest to God* does. Thousands of Christians rejoice that *from the Church* it is said that there is such a thing as "religionless Christianity"; that God is not a man-like person, "out there", that man no longer needs to look either to philosophy or to religion for direction; he is where he is, achieving what destiny he chooses; religion belongs to the past, not to the world of assumed fact; theology is a mere squabble about fancies, useless in the world of empirical action. It is therefore our responsibility to recognise that the divine must be found in ordinary everyday experience and its opportunities and responsibilities; that we have not to accept Christ and worship Him because we are told that He is divine, but to worship what is divine in Him, and in all men.

Whether the Bishop of Woolwich has clearly seen where this leads him or not, there is little doubt where this new conception of the sacred is taking a large section of the Church. There is an almost volcanic ferment within it today. We see it in the considerable support in Church Synods and Assemblies for Nuclear Disarmament, in the widespread and energetic repudiation of racialism—at home, in America and in Africa. This finds organised expression in the work of Canon John Collins and *Christian Action*; but it finds support everywhere. The Bishop of Matabeleland, when Mr. Ian Smith declared that UDI was a blow for the preservation of Christianity, said in Westminster Abbey:

This is not the religion of Christ. It is because of this kind of blasphemy that people are rejecting it in Africa today.

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The Archbishop of Canterbury has not only declared that the ultimate use of force might be necessary in Rhodesia and would be justified in that case, but has manifested a forthright determination to say exactly what he thinks on such issues regardless of the fury this arouses in churchmen like Quintin Hogg.

One of the most moving and significant declarations of sympathy and indeed spiritual identity with the new nations now standing on their own feet and making their own destinies, comes from Father Trevor Huddleston, Bishop of Masari in Tanzania, whose courageous resistance to Apartheid along with Archbishop Joost de Blank won our admiration some few years ago. He feels in the resurgent nationalism of these liberated peoples, and exactly the same would be true of the New Democracies in Europe,

a sense of social power and purpose. It is the sense of having a freely chosen direction in planning for the future. It is the realisation that, at last, administrator and people are part of one urgent drive to the building of a nation. And this, with whatever mistakes and frustrations and difficulties there may be, means life.<sup>1</sup>

He adds that there is an immense satisfaction in being no longer one of the ruling race doing good to a subject people, but sharing as an equal and a participant in an emerging *African* social order, an immense exhilaration just because a whole country is in movement to the rich possibilities of an African Socialist State.

Having said so much, and this does mean influential if not numerous allies for every forward advance, it is also necessary to recognise the still powerful forces of reaction in the Church and above all the vast apathy and immovable prejudices of the vast majority of churchgoers. It is mainly the parsons and not the pew that we look to for support. In fact their congregations

<sup>1</sup> *Observer*—December 19th, 1965.

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often break the hearts of ministers preaching in vain a gospel of social responsibility.

But the religious movement in Britain, unlike that on the Continent, is not by any means a matter of expediency, a move dictated by the fear of losing influence. It arises from a perfectly genuine recognition of the challenge of a capitalist society—acquisitive, involved necessarily in colonial exploitation and war, profiteering from armaments, regardless of human welfare when it stands in the way of profits—to the enlightened Christian conscience. This is an ethical revolt against the very bases of the capitalist system, admirably expressed in the last pages of Tawney's book on *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*:

The quality in modern societies, which is most strongly opposed to the teaching of the Founder of the Christian Faith . . . consists in the assumption that the attainment of material riches is the supreme object of human endeavour and the final criterion of human success. Such a philosophy, plausible, militant, and not indisposed, when hard pressed, to silence criticism by persecution, may triumph or may decline. What is certain is that it is the negation of any system of thought or morals which can be described as Christian. Compromise is as impossible between the Church of Christ and the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and the State idolatry of the Roman Empire.

What then are we to do?

1. We must repudiate the idea that those outside the Communist movement, whether workers or middle-class non-socialists, whether religious or mainly interested in science and culture, constitute "one reactionary mass". The Church, as a community, is not part of the reaction.

2. It is not our task in relation to the Church to launch an attack on its ideology in the name of atheism. Within the Church "there persist the conditions and the pressure to move

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to the Left which we must understand and assist. For this purpose, the old atheist propoganda is of no use".<sup>1</sup>

Again turning to Marx "We do not turn secular questions into theological questions: we turn theological questions into secular ones." Religion flourishes as a manifestation of *social* defects within a democratic state.

"We explain the religious backwardness of free citizens in terms of their social narrowness in order to abolish their social fetters."<sup>2</sup>

3. It is not our business to construe our relation to the Church in terms of a philosophical attack on its theology; though this is part of our theoretical treatment of contemporary thought. We are concerned with the broad basis of common action on which we may expect and demand co-operation from Christians, and we should in seeking for this avoid being led into controversy on theoretical differences between Christianity and Marxism. Some religious persons will wish to divert our attention in this direction: we should not be misguided by them.

4. On the other hand, where a strong tendency to the secularisation of religion appears, we should welcome it in spite of its inconsistencies and short-comings, since it offers an opportunity provided by religious persons to show that they have come closer to our position.

5. There does arise, therefore, usually but not always in other connections than joint action on progressive struggles, and quite frequently in open dialogues on the relations of Marxism to Christianity, the task of removing misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Marxism, especially regarding the importance of the individual. This will, increasingly, give us an opportunity not to be missed.

6. In this matter, while the main theoretical discussion will be confined to a minority, we must remember that there is a

<sup>1</sup> Togliatti—*Memorandum*—Yalta, August 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Marx. *The Jewish Question*.

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steady process of infiltration from intellectuals to wider circles through press and radio. The continuous and patient work of refuting religious misrepresentations of Marxism will prove invaluable and is absolutely necessary.

7. Reverting to the ground for common action. We raise no difficulty as to working alongside those who disagree with us on ideological grounds. Should Christians be reluctant to work with us, we may wonder whether they really desire to overcome the evils we both oppose since without every possible aid they cannot possibly hope to succeed. To refuse a fire hose to put out one's burning house, because of a theological difference, would suggest less than a strong desire to save the house. If there is a strong desire, our help will not be refused.

8. What we are likely to achieve by the extension of such discussions between Marxists and Christians is not only a widening of the sphere of common action and the breaking down of entirely baseless prejudices and illusions—these being important immediate objectives; but there are other more indirect results with still more important long-term consequences.

Firstly, the claim for the ethical superiority of the Christian position rests wholly on distortions of the Marxist's view of the individual, the State, freedom and materialism. To show that the practice of an accepted moral code can only lead to hypocrisy or futility unless a radical reconstruction of the system of social relations makes it feasible, exposes the futility of merely preaching love and brotherhood. We may thus rob our opponent of the shining armour of superior moral rectitude and leave him, insofar as he continues to oppose us, to fight on without his armour and perhaps with more respect for the programme which stands for the *conditions* which alone make it possible to practise the Christian ethic effectively.

Secondly, we are not only concerned with those who take common action with us, or who then and there change their attitude to Marxism. The world is changing, contradictions are accentuated, the balance of forces shifts; a totally new situation,

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if prepared for by the discussions we are considering, finds many people, including leading figures, once quite alienated and hostile, now ready to see the full force of our case, to move over into co-operation, and in not a few cases to join our ranks. It is never only the rational case for Communism that convinces, but the march of events, the ripening of the situation, the emergence of new crises on the one hand and new opportunity on the other, that wins growing support. But this requires the preparatory work of removing ignorance and prejudice, presenting reasonable criticism of idealistic policies, clarifying the objective grounds for Communist solutions. This was well seen in the sudden, and to many people, unexpected unity of Communists and Socialists in support of Mitterand and against de Gaulle. There are even more striking and important shifts of non-Communist opinion which will manifest themselves as the world situation enters the new phases which undoubtedly lie ahead.

The dialogue between Christians and Marxists is an essential preparation for such days of crisis and opportunity.



## EDWARD CHARLES

*(Vicar of All Saints', Oxhey)*

DR. JOHN LEWIS' tribute to progressive Christians is generous and his plea for increased Communist-Christian co-operation for peace and justice is timely. I myself have happy memories of such co-operation, from the late thirties (Aid for Spain and National Unemployed Workers' Movement) to the present peace campaigns.

During that time I have naturally honoured the many Communists who have borne unpopularity, victimisation and even martyrdom. Catholics and Communists fought and died together for republican Spain and in Buchenwald Pastor Schneider and Ernst Thaelmann gave their lives for their beliefs. For these reasons, though conscious of inadequacy, I greatly value the opportunity to take part in what I hope will be a lively dialectic on this vital subject.

I agree with Dr. Lewis that such a "dialogue between Christians and Marxists" is "an essential preparation for the present days of crisis and opportunity" but I cannot see how we are to exclude "controversy on theoretical differences between Christianity and Marxism". So far from this being a naughty diversionary tactic of some Christians, as he suggests, I regard it as an exercise of the utmost value, provided only that

1. The differences are stated in a spirit of mutual respect;
2. The many points of theoretical agreement are also emphasised.

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I admit that there are Christians who overlook these requirements, and I agree with Dr. Lewis that Communists should not waste time arguing with them. I must, however, take issue with Dr. Lewis when he suggests, with regard to "new theology", that "The philosophical justification, or even the theology, does not matter at all" and when he puts into the minds of those influenced by this "new theology" the thought "that man no longer needs to look either to philosophy or religion for direction, he is where he is, achieving what destiny he chooses." "To demolish the philosophical bases of Christian theology," he says, "makes little difference to Christianity, which, like all religion, is not an edifice built on a rational theoretical foundation but an institution brought into being by social and psychological needs."

Now I can take from Dr. Lewis his reasons for believing that the Christian faith is untrue, but not a bland statement that its truth or otherwise is not even worth arguing about. I have always regarded him as one who understood the importance of a true theory. Is he not on the Editorial Board of *Marxism Today*? Did he not introduce "A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy" as follows?—"Such practical people as the Russian Communists are deeply concerned about philosophy. It is frequently assumed that a practical man can do very well without a philosophy, that the religious and metaphysical beliefs of a scientist or a politician have no relation to their life's work and that speculation constitutes a more or less leisure-time occupation, like music or golf. But the Russian knows that a man's creed matters."

I hope therefore that in this debate he will concede that the criterion of truth applies to all schemes of thought, even to religion. For there can be no meaningful dialectic between different ways of life unless they are both referred to an unconditional truth, to which both strive to approach. I regard this as so important that I must quote Lenin on the subject (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, page 198):

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From the standpoint of modern materialism, i.e. Marxism, the *limits* of approximation of our knowledge to the objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is *unconditional*, and the fact that we are approaching nearer to it is also unconditional.

We come now to Dr. Lewis' apparent identification of "an other-worldly and mystical faith" with organised religion. It is, of course, true that many representatives of organised religion are other-worldly; but all the this-worldly Christians Dr. Lewis mentions with such generous appreciation, from Charles Kingsley to Pope John, have also been representatives of organised religion. Indeed, the Christian faith (like dialectical materialism) can only continue in an organised form.

From organised religion we proceed to "South Bank Christianity"—regardless of the fact that gathered together in Southwark Cathedral was a wide variety of outlook, ranging from the fascinating speculations of Canon John Pearce-Higgins to the rigid theological orthodoxy of that great socialist pioneer, Canon Stanley Evans.

No, Dr. Lewis, "South Bank Christianity" is an invention of the reactionary *Church Times*, and has no more basis in fact than that other Aunt Sally of the conservatives, "The New Theology". There is nothing new in the belief in God as the ground of our being, rather than "a man-like person out there?" Indeed, since the second Commandment, the picturing of God as a man-like person has been expressly forbidden to both Jews and Christians. The belief in God as Holy Trinity is entirely different, enshrining as it does the belief in fellowship and community as the essentials of our human existence, and indeed, of the universe as a whole. The conception of God "in the midst" rather than "above the bright blue sky" has indeed been stressed by John Wren Lewis and the Bishop of Woolwich. But it was already implied in the widespread Liturgical Movement of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches, where minister and people gather round the Lord's table at the Communion, rather than looking out over it "into the blue".

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And this again is not new, but a return to the practice of the primitive Christians, as shown by their writings and by the shape of their basilicas.

Neither is there anything "new" in what Dr. Lewis so well describes as "the recognition of the sacred, either in the 'numinous' or the mystical or the sacramental on the one hand, or in the demands which the needs of our fellow men present to our impulse to pity and fellowship on the other". It is unfortunate that too many Christians have emphasised the former at the expense of the latter, but both have been of the texture of the Christian life from the earliest days. Christians of all ages would echo what Dr. Lewis says, that "it is our responsibility to recognise that the divine must be found in ordinary everyday experience and its opportunities and responsibilities: that we have not to accept Christ and worship Him because we are told that He is divine, but to worship what is divine in Him, and in all men". The symbol of this is the offering of the bread and the wine, representing man's work and leisure, at the Holy Communion, and receiving it back as something sacred, the life of Christ Himself.

We come now to two of the many ways in which Communists and Christians can help one another. Communists should show Christians that "the practice of an accepted moral code can only lead to hypocrisy or futility unless a radical reconstruction of the system of social relations makes it feasible". How right Dr. Lewis is here; indeed, Christians ought already to know that you cannot put new wine into old bottles: but we often forget, and need our Communist friends to remind us.

On the other hand, Christians have a lot to offer by way of incentives to those engaged in building socialism. I remember hearing the Rev. Professor Hromadka of Prague saying in 1950 that the state has to provide the blueprints of a good building, but the churches can help to provide good materials for its construction. Individual bonuses are useful but not enough; deeper incentives for self-denying, brotherly application to the work can be found within the resources of the Christian faith,

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now, while things are difficult, and especially when socialism is in its early stages.

A good example of this is mentioned by Dr. Lewis—Bishop Trevor Huddleston of Masasi (*sic*) in Tanzania. There are those who remember him as the fearless opponent of apartheid in South Africa, and regard his present employment as a waste of talent. But helping to provide the motive power for building a brotherly society, as they try to do in Tanzania, is an enterprise second to none in importance for our age.

Let me conclude by mentioning some points of theory on which Christians and Communists can be agreed, and which are needed if our actions are to be well judged and effective. Both interpret history as a slow development alternating with crisis. Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to mustard seed, leaven, lightning, childbirth. Marxists call it the change of quality into quantity, as when water is gradually heated and suddenly becomes steam.

1. They trace the gradual development and then critical transformation of society through primitive Communism, slavery, serfdom, the labour market and socialism. The first of these transformations, which took place with the development of private property and class-divided society, bears striking resemblance to the Genesis story of the Fall; the last is still in process: when it is completed by Communism they reckon that history in a true sense will have begun and pre-history be completed, and Christians have no need to quarrel with this assessment.

2. How about the persecutions and struggles which have to be borne in the achievement of that hope?

To the Christian they are a privilege, the sharing of the Cross of Christ, which is at the heart of reality. Communists also believe that all progress comes through struggle.

3. To the Christian all thoughts and ideas are linked with material things—his symbol of this is the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh, and the Sacrament, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Likewise the

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outlook of an individual is linked with his material position. "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God." "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God." "Where a man's treasure is, there shall his heart be also." The similarity to Marxism is obvious.

4. Both systems are agreed that theory and practice cannot be separated. "By their fruits ye shall know them." "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." (Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*. XI.)

Christians look chiefly to the Church as their means to achieve their aims. The Church does not actively engage in party politics, but is rather intended by Christ to be an example, inspiration and working-model of the Kingdom of God on earth, of justice and brotherhood, which they pray for in the Lord's Prayer. There is growing realisation, however, among Christians that the Church is called on to engage in political action and its members often in party action, if they are to be effective.

Dr. Lewis has cited many occasions on which Christians and Communists have already collaborated to resist oppression and forward progress. May the number rapidly increase! For our aims are the same, whether expressed as the Kingdom of God on earth or the classless (undivided) society. At the present time the speed of the general advance is great, but there are setbacks and holdups, whether in Indonesia, Ghana, Vietnam, Rhodesia. We need one another's help to make the next moves forward. We need to learn from one another in the process.

## D. M. MACKINNON

*(Professor MacKinnon, whose main subject is the philosophy of religion, is the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, at present Gifford Lecturer in the University of Edinburgh. In 1953 he edited the symposium "Christian Faith and Communist Faith", and in 1957 published "A Study in Ethical Theory")*

I AM very glad to be given the opportunity of commenting on Dr. John Lewis's interesting article in the March number of *Marxism Today* (pp. 70-75). The extension and deepening of the dialogue between Christians and Marxists is clearly a matter of the greatest importance. As Dr. Lewis remarks in his article, where Christian theology is concerned, we live in a time in which the very foundations are being broken up. In the references he makes to contemporary writers, especially in these islands, Dr. Lewis shows a commendable fairness, even a measure of restraint, where some of their weaknesses are concerned. It is, however, unfortunate that he omits all reference to the massive figure of Karl Barth. It is perfectly true that in his earlier years Barth identified himself with an uncompromising transcendentalism; yet his later work manifests very different emphasis, and no-one who knows even the elements of the history of the German Church struggle, can be ignorant of the extent to which it was Barth's thought that provided a great part of its intellectual formation. Again, there is no mention in Dr. Lewis' article of the brave essay in dialogue of the kind for which he pleads, initiated in Czechoslovakia in

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the very difficult years *before* 1956 by Dr. Josef Hromadka. I do not think that Hromadka would deny the depth of his indebtedness to Barth in clearing his mind of the sort of assumptions which would have effectively debarred him from the extremely bold, even spiritually dangerous, directions in which he tried to move. There is a quality of radicalism in Barth's thought which renders anyone, even quite superficially schooled in his teachings, ready to throw caution to the winds, and seek to speak with his fellow men, whatever their situation, however strange and unfamiliar the intellectual and moral attitudes which they have adopted, may, at first sight, seem to be.

Yet I mention Barth, not to correct Dr. Lewis' factual presentation, but rather to urge the relevance to his theme of the work of a theologian whose standpoint is compromisingly realist. For Barth, human history, whether men and women acknowledge the fact or not, has found its centre, and, indeed, is continually finding its centre, in the great disturbance of Christ's incarnation. His work contains a most powerful antidote to every form of theological subjectivism, including, indeed, that sort of subjectivism any careful student must notice in the work of Dr. Rudolf Bultmann, to which Dr. Lewis refers. For him faith does not in any sense create its object; rather, it is overtaken by that object. In belief men come to terms, not in the first instance with themselves, but with that through which an ultimate sense has been given to their world. To say this is, of course, to advertise at once the depth of the difference that must divide Christians from Marxists, and yet, at the same time, to suggest a certain underlying similarity of temper.

The most illuminating Marxist work that I have read recently has been the German translation of Dr. Adam Schaff's studies in the treatment of the individual by Marxists, on the one side, and Existentialists, especially Sartre, on the other (*Marx oder Sartre?*: Europa Verlag, 1964). I hope that our contemporary Christian radicals will pay attention to the arguments of this book; for they are very relevant to much



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that is currently fashionable! The philosopher Whitehead remarked, referring to the liberal Christians of an earlier generation, that "they spend their energies in an elaborate and sustained effort to find new reasons for persuading men and women to continue to go to Church in the old way". Something of the same sort is very noticeable, especially in these islands, at the present time. Questions concerning truth and falsity are left on one side, and much energy is expended on the attempt to find in Existentialist categories of thought, ways of defending and perpetuating largely conventional pieties. The emphasis is subjectivist in the sense in which Schaff in his book indicates that the Existentialist exploration of the freedom of the human individual usually is. What matters is not the human situation, but the emotional texture of the way in which men and women respond to it. We are less concerned with the stuff of which our situation is made than with the cultivation of our personal feelings, with the tragic dignity with which we can invest our acceptance of the inevitable, etc. I have heard it suggested by one distinguished contemporary Scottish interpreter of Bultmann's thought, that it is from Christianity that "men and women must learn how to suffer aright". Not, you will notice, how to eliminate the causes of human suffering, how in a measure more effectively to make ourselves masters of our destiny, but simply how to accept what it is subtly suggested it would be almost impious to seek to change!

In 1961, in a report on the ethical problems raised by the development and use of nuclear weapons, a committee set up by the British Council of Churches urged Christians to "learn to live with the bomb". Again, what they counselled was not an effort at radical understanding, aimed at eliminating the appalling distortion of human achievement, seemingly built into the fabric of our world, but an acceptance of what it was alleged could not be changed. Christians often accuse Marxists of determinism; but when the student of the history of our age contrasts the attitude of mind advocated in this deplorable

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document, with the extraordinary resolution displayed by Lenin in his hour of opportunity in the autumn of 1917, he must surely begin to wonder whether the boot should not be on the other foot. Certainly I have become increasingly aware of the extent to which Christians who have allowed themselves to be tricked by the superficial attractiveness of subjectivist styles of thought, have sold out to a very crude sort of historical determinism, without realising what they were, in fact, doing.

Schaff excellently brings out in his book the significance of Marxism as a standing embodiment of human conviction that men and women can be, in a very real sense, masters of their destiny. Although he expresses a certain distaste for the concept of alienation so important in the younger Marx, he brings out something of its power. We can learn to see that we are not in bondage to what we have achieved; we can *understand* and change; yet we can only understand if we are prepared for the risks involved in the attempt to re-make our world. It is tempting for the Christian simply to write off such an attitude as impiety, and to take refuge in a cult of resignation, pointing (fairly enough) to the profound moral problems raised by the practice of the Leninist state as justifying his claim that the whole enterprise stands under condemnation. But this simply will not do; it is indeed a new variation on the old theme of basing religious apologetic on a pessimistic evaluation of human achievement.

It is my conviction that if Christians are prepared to take seriously Barth's overriding sense of the presence of Christ to all men, they can find in the fierce optimism always discernible in Marxist attitudes something, I will not say wholly valid, but at least nearer to human actuality than, e.g. "the cultivation of a right attitude to suffering", etc. We have to learn (and this, indeed, is one of the lessons taught by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, himself deeply indebted to Barth) that the disciplined effort to understand and to change the world, in active pursuit of human happiness, is most certainly a place in which we may be overtaken by the object of our faith, and find our understanding of

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his often unexpected import and his mysterious humility profoundly enlarged.

I have said nothing in these notes of what we may learn from Marxism by way of a criticism of the Church as an empirical institution involved in the contradictions of human history. The maxim of Reformation ecclesiology is *ecclesia non solum reformata sed semper reformanda*—a Church not only reformed, but ever to be reformed. As an Anglican, I can avow that few churches show so little sense of the need for radical reformation in this present as the "Church of England as by law established". One thinks of the (admittedly severely criticised) operations of the Church Commissioners; one recalls the grotesque, built-in anti-democracy of the present methods of episcopal appointment; the Church's class-image is a hardly bearable scandal. Again one fears the Existentialist way of escape from facing up to the sociological realities, and again one must welcome dialogue with Marxists as an effective source of corrective here. In such conversation Christians must above all welcome radical exposure to the inescapable, ultimate question of truth, and to the related question of the extent to which concern for existing ecclesiastical institutions provides a mechanism for dodging that issue, while disguising the fact by ingenious if implausible rhetoric, concerning presence to the modern world, etc. It is, now as before, from the Marxist critique of every sort of idealism that Christians have most to learn.

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I AM grateful to the Rev. Edward Charles for what he has said. Our differences do not touch the main issue. If I think the theological debate should not take priority it is not because philosophy is unimportant but because when the house is blazing I do not want to drag the fireman away from his hose to discuss the Laws of Thermodynamics. I think therefore that we need two separate but allied discussions; the main philosophical differences will go on being argued—I myself am continuously up to the neck in them—and they will chiefly concern those interested in theory. But there are many more people both clerical and lay who are not so interested in theology as they are in Vietnam, the seamen's strike and the Cold War. Edward Charles and I happen to be in both lots; but most people aren't.

The main point on the philosophical side seems to be this: I say that if thousands of Christians are now seeing the main impact and authority of religion in the challenge of social injustice and war, I am not going to argue with them as to whether this depends on certain theological assumptions. Marxists don't think so, but that isn't going to stop us joining forces with those that do; and I don't want the fact that we don't accept the theological justification of the moral or social protests to keep the religious people from working cordially and harmoniously with us. I don't think Edward Charles really disagrees here.

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He himself has said much that is more in line with my article than with his criticism!<sup>1</sup>

Christianity is primarily concerned with human relationships.

Christianity did not arise as an explanation of reality but as a fellowship of men and women ordering their lives in accordance with a dynamic conviction that a new world order was being established on earth.

It is only in the derivative realm of speculation that conflicts arise between men of science (read *Marxists*) and Christians. (This is my very point—J.L.)

Christians, like anyone else, are free to indulge in metaphysical speculation; but this, it should be recognised is not of the essence of Christianity.

There! the Rev. Edward Charles has said it all; what is it that we are disagreeing about? Well, I do differ about his estimation of the extent within the Church of ethical concern and full recognition of the sacred as being in these desperate issues of social justice, war and peace. He seems to think this far more generally recognised than I think it is. But here my reply is a simple one: I shan't mind a bit being shown I'm wrong by whole congregations turning out to march in the May Day Processions, or flocking to Trafalgar Square for demonstrations against the Vietnam War. I don't see them yet; but by golly I should like to.

Professor MacKinnon's deeply sympathetic letter warms my heart. I don't think the pietistic movement in Lutheran Christianity is really sensible of the social implications of Christianity. The followers of Barth and Brunner are much divided. Brunner was furious with Barth for opposing the Cold War. But when a man's beliefs drive him to take issue with evil in the modern world and to ally himself with the forces of righteousness I am his friend and ally, and I would

<sup>1</sup> In his essay "Science and Christianity" (*Return to Reality*, edited by Canon S. Evans).

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rejoice even more if he could bring more and more of his followers over—but I don't see them. Dr. Josef Hromadka is well known to me, and I ought of course to have mentioned him. It is encouraging to find so many members of the Church in Czechoslovakia fully convinced, as so many are in Russia and other socialist countries, that the work the Socialist State is trying to do is a realisation of Christian ideals. I am grateful for Professor MacKinnon's remarks on Adam Schaff's work; and especially his agreement with Schaff's criticism of the mere change of inward attitude, a mere act of choice which is not determined by a recognition of the objective situation that demands it.

I am anxious that the issues Professor MacKinnon and the Rev. Edward Charles raise shall however not be confined to a top-level exchange of opinion. It is the rank and file who are as ready for it as we are. It must be organised there. But I have already met a strong reluctance in some Christian leaders to a confrontation with Marxists, because they, unlike my two Christian friends, seem alarmed at the prospect of being unable to maintain their own very distorted picture of Marxism, which would be impossible if they would speak *with* us and not just *about* us. That is why the removal of those misrepresentations which keep Christians and Marxists apart is a necessary phase of the dialogue.

## ADAM FOX

(*Canon Adam Fox: for twenty years a Canon of Westminster, before that a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford; author of a life of Dean Inge (James Tait Black Memorial Book Prize for 1960); retired 1963. He reads Plato and Greek Tragedies for pleasure; his Plato for Pleasure recently re-issued*)

I WAS much surprised when it was suggested to me that I might contribute to *Marxism Today*, because I am only a very old and a very old-fashioned clergyman, and I like to think myself orthodox. But I was much interested to read the articles on The Dialogue between Christianity and Marxism in the March and May numbers, and perhaps I have something to say which might supplement them. For it appears to me that both John Lewis and Edward Charles have tried to discuss some common ground in a very useful way, but they have not really grappled with the fundamental difference between the two ideologies; Marxism, if I understand rightly, is only concerned with this world, while Christianity is and always has been an other-worldly religion. The attempts made by some of those who profess it to get rid of "heaven", as it is called, can only succeed in getting rid of Christianity, or so it seems to me. This other-worldliness needs to be reckoned with. "Escapism", you say. Yes certainly, in its own particular fashion, as expressed by the apostle Paul in the form "with Christ, which is far better",<sup>1</sup> but by no means confined to the Christians. Marcus Aurelius, a dogged Stoic, exclaims, "The

<sup>1</sup> Philippians, 1.23.

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poet says, Dear city of Cecrops; And mayst thou not say, Dear City of Zeus?" The great Plotinus was intent upon the "yonder": the consummation was to be "the flight of the alone to the Alone".

But let me use my own words: that is the only way to be lucid, if there is a way at all. My view of the world about us is in one sentence that it is not the real world, but a shadow or a projection or a pattern or a distorted mirage—call it what you will—of a real world of which it give us intimations. But if it is only a shadow, it is a real shadow. That sounds something like Plato, you say. Yes, Platonism is just what it is, and a Platonism which is always floating about in men's minds, and not least in Christian minds. Whether Paul knew anything of Plato's writings is uncertain, but he is being almost precisely Platonist when he says "the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the tent we inhabit on earth is taken down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, and in heaven".<sup>1</sup> (To call the body "a tent" as here, was the philosophical language of the day.) To contrast the temporal and the eternal, the seen and the unseen, is just after Plato's mind; he would have said that the one is an intimation of the other, and Paul says the same in words which anyone who knew more of Plato than of Paul might very well attribute to Plato: "Since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divinity, have been visible, being apprehended in what he has made (lit. in his makings)."<sup>2</sup> Plato and Paul come to this characteristically Platonic view by different routes. It is what Christian Platonists stand by; the Christian Platonists of Alexandria stood by it in the third century, and the group of Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century stood by it.

It is what I am standing by now. I think this world about me is full of wonders which I could never have suspected, and there

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians, 4.18-5.1.

<sup>2</sup> Romans, 1.20.



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are no doubt many more to come. I see order is one of its great qualities (the Greeks thought it was *the* great quality) and beauty is another, and variety and invention too; it is marvelously contrived; it looks like a work of art. I do not feel at all satisfied with supposing it just came like it is; that is not good enough; there must be a mind behind it all, a mind which I certainly cannot understand altogether; but I can understand it a little, and enough to think it implies a person, and for convenience, if for no other reason, I call this person God; and for the purposes of my own thinking I give him a body, and add other imagery to that, but of course it is inadequate imagery, because it can only be taken from this unreal world.

But why do I call it "this unreal world"? Because it has so many symptoms of unreality. It is as elusive as a ghost. I cannot stop it at some desirable moment; it will not keep still; I grasp at it, but I cannot hold it; it offers me images of pleasure and happiness, but they are apt to fade away, or if attained, not to be up to expectation. Desirables are often in short supply; and yet it is characteristic of man that he can have more than is good for him of almost everything, though this is far from saying that everyone can have enough; wine is a good example. This world seems all unfinished too. Some of it, to say the least, still needs a good deal of beautifying, and not everything has been reduced to order. We have tried to order it ourselves, and we have been very successful in many ways, though only in one big way. We have got some things under our control in quite a big way indeed, but this has only been where we can measure them. As Einstein once said, "I don't talk about reality, only what I can measure up." And even the measuring up is baffling; the lapse of time to the extent of millions of years, the distance from us of the heavenly bodies and their number, are baffling. If this world is an end in itself, it is plain silly, it does not make sense, and we humans with our aspirations and agonies are quite out of place in it, at best such stuff as dreams are made of.

But if this world and this life are intimations of another world, then they become significant. They give us clear intima-

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tion of infinity and eternity, but of much else. Plato called his other world a world of "ideas" or forms, but he never could quite say what was in it. One of the things he put in it was the idea of a table, and this it seemed, somehow tended to take the form of a general proposition, as that "table is an object to put things on, having a flat top and not less than three legs", and all the tables you ever saw were copies of this one which in fact probably didn't exist, in any accepted sense.<sup>1</sup> But a world of ideas would be rather arid, and in the end he stopped writing about it. The Christians are not altogether certain about their world either; they call it heaven, but allow that it is not in the sky: they are however sure that it is delightful and picture it as such: it consists of indestructibles; if these are material, they are not of this world's matter: they are indescribable except by images, but they are real. Sometimes they are reduced to Beauty, Truth and Goodness, but this is a simplification. At least this world gives intimations, imperfect but often vivid, of perfection in the way of happiness and fellowship, a vision to see, perhaps a song to hear, satisfaction, peace, all of them only glimpsed at in this life. If all these are only dreams, then this life is doubly futile, as being the dream of a dream; it would not be a rational world at all. But our experience of the rational makes it certain that there must be a wholly rational (not only rational) world; and the corollary to this is that the world as we know it at present is not the real thing.

I imagine that Marxists will have nothing of all this. "It is just poetry," they will say. Well, it is poetry, but I won't allow it to be called "just poetry". So far poetry has moved the world a great deal more than statistics. It may be we are in for a new age for the matter of that, but I don't believe so myself.

What then is my attitude to life in this world as I see it? In a way I can say to myself that life does not matter very much. This is not to go along with Arthur Balfour who said, or is believed to have said, that nothing matters much and most

<sup>1</sup> *Republic* X. 596.

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things don't matter at all. That is not so. But a good deal of life is made up of trifles which we can deal with as they come along, not intent upon them, but not neglecting them either. They are like the air, they keep us alive. And at a level higher than triviality there are pleasures and improvements which claim serious attention; they make life tolerable, and more, they make it pleasant. But it is the great perfections that claim our utmost effort, not that these are attainable in this life, but we can grow fit for perfection when it comes; though, if we have made no effort or very little, we shall find perfection disquieting, daunting, even perhaps insipid. And if perfection is never to come, then effort is only a pastime.

To some it is given, though not to me, to think that the better ordering of human society is the thing most worth striving for. Strive for it we always shall, but it seems as if, by making this an end in itself, we shall end with no more than good intentions. Capitalism would work nicely, if everyone did his very best at the job he is paid for, but all too soon he begins to wonder whether he is paid enough. Communism has the very good idea of Fair Shares for all, but before long there must be bosses to say what are fair shares. Political economy is no substitute for personal responsibility, and a high sense of responsibility needs the sanction of some motive for self-sacrifice, and service to the community does not seem to be a sufficiently strong motive. For some at least Christianity provides it. Is this world by nature good enough for Marxism?

I have tried to say as a Christian what Marxism, unless I have been quite mistaken about it, is up against. "And what a lot of nonsense," I hear somebody saying, but this has been said before. About the year A.D. 55 what the Christians were preaching<sup>1</sup> seemed to the Jews an offence and to the Greeks sheer folly. But it won the day, and in spite of some irrelevant talk about "the space-age" this old world, or at least the men in it, look much the same as ever.

<sup>1</sup> Corinthians, 1.23.

## JACK DUNMAN

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I AM glad indeed that *Marxism Today* has come into the dialogue of Marxism and Christianity; or perhaps one should say Religion, because it should not be confined to Christianity. The dialogue has in fact gone very much further than might be inferred. For example, *World Marxist Review*<sup>1</sup> recently quoted the following:

Marxism is not a vulgar form of materialism. It is atheistic because atheism is an integral part of its world outlook. It believes in the need for and adequacy of material reality, while religion and idealism thrust man beyond its confines, alienate him and hamper his liberation. This atheism is, therefore, not a denial, but an expression of humanism which has its own eschatology. It is necessary that we understand that denial of the transcendental as far as Marxists are concerned is not a fault but a virtue since it enables man to rediscover himself. This world outlook cannot be countered by polemics or false praise alone. What is needed is a deep study of this world outlook so as to be able in the future to enter into a dialogue with Marxists which Paul VI in his encyclical "Ecclesiam Suam" thinks is almost impossible.

This statement was made by a Catholic, a Spanish Catholic and a Bishop; no hedge priest, but the secretary of the Spanish

<sup>1</sup> *Social Doctrine of the Vatican and the 20th Century* by Libero Pierantozzi, Vol. 8, No. 7, July 1965.

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Episcopacy. And it was made in St. Peter's, at the Ecumenical Council. I myself had the pleasure of "dialoguing" at a Catholic Teachers' Training College with a well-known member of the Society of Jesus; and the audience, and he himself, were in no way offended when I remarked that for some of the time, I had thought I was listening to the Bishop of Woolwich.

One of the reasons for this revolutionary change is, in Spain, mutual recognition by the Catholic Church and the Communist Party that they are the only effective opponents of the Franco regime. In Africa, as was pointed out in an article in *New Times* (No. 35, 1965) "The Catholic Church in the 'Third World'" by Julius Stroynowski, the Church is compelled to come closer to the people precisely because it is losing ground to Islam. Hence the Mass in the vernacular: not mainly for the benefit of Catholics in Britain.

I think also that we Marxists must recognise in the modern world a certain disintegration of moral values (indeed, it reflects the disintegration of capitalism) and an unwillingness to recognise, much less seek out, an aim in life; a hostility to any form of commitment. This is not shared by religious people from Catholic to extreme evangelical, so that immediately Marxists find they have some common ground with them.

Further, it is clear that the efforts of churchmen, whether the Bishop of Woolwich or some Catholics, to bring their church closer to the modern world, involves an exaltation of the importance of relations with other people at the expense of hitherto existing concepts of God. Their efforts to relate this attitude to older forms of religion and its various concepts (e.g. prayer) may not interest Marxists very deeply, and may at times even seem a little absurd. But they are not in fact addressed to us, and I do not know really why we should object to them. We must recognise that to religious people they have a deep significance.

This leads me to agree with much that is said by Edward Charles. I think that John Lewis opened up the question well, but the implication that the fundamental beliefs of Christians

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and others do not matter and need not be discussed, seems to me bound to inhibit the progressive development of understanding. Our philosophy is important to us; we can restrain our desire to proselytise, but we are surely correct to want our colleagues in dialogue at least to understand what it is. Christians must be allowed to feel the same.

Likewise, I doubt if it is really helpful to stress so heavily the passages in the Marxist classics which postulate the total disappearance of religion as soon as we have a satisfactory economic system. We seem to be saying to Christians: "We don't think your illusions are worth discussing because we know (do Marxists *know*?) that they will all fade away when we have peace and three square meals a day." Christians do not keep telling us that materialism does not matter because the Kingdom of God will clear it all up in good time, and we should be irritated if they did.

This brings us to the really fundamental question: are we going beyond agreeing to stop talking about the disappearance of religion, and to begin to recognise that the present mighty intellectual travail that is taking place in the Church may result in some positive contribution to our understanding of the world we live in? Certainly the dialogue will be happier if we are able to do so, and I am going to risk my own immortal Marxist soul by saying I think we should recognise it may.

Let me put it in this way. When we discuss with Christians, one of the chief stumbling blocks is the question: "In the absence of Religion, what is there to make men behave decently towards each other?" Our answer is that the recognition of the need to work together is the basic sanction: modern economic organisation means that only by working for other people, and they for you, can you benefit yourself. This involves unhappy echoes of Adam Smith, though the New Testament text "Ye are all members one of another" does something to make it sound a bit better. But in many debates and dialogues, I have had a slight feeling of inadequacy about it. When we think of the heroes of our own movement, from Bram Fischer

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backwards, and the vast amount of self-sacrifice our movement has produced, "enlightened self-interest" hardly seems enough. We admire these people precisely because self-interest has been driven away to the opposite pole of their existence. I think we Marxists could well allow admiration and emulation of this human capability *for its own sake* to be a factor in our own appreciation of the universe we inhabit.

Whether this is very different from what the Bishop of Woolwich and others are saying, I do not know. It requires more study by all of us. It is expressed by one of the writers whom the Bishop quotes with approval that "the experience of personal relationship . . . is an encounter with the Transcendent". He certainly says a lot more designed to make the point acceptable to members of his Church; and to enable them to retain forms, ideas and ceremonies that have become important to them. With this attitude of his, we should entirely sympathise. It simply proves he is in earnest about winning acceptance for the revolutionary ideas he has evolved (and do not forget, Catholic thinkers are doing the same).

I believe that if we recognise the possibility of Marxism moving perhaps only a little, while Christianity moves perhaps a lot, dialogue, understanding and co-operation will be very greatly advanced. So will Socialism, Marxism and human decency.

## THOMAS CORBISHLEY, S.J.

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ONE of the fundamental requirements for dialogue of any kind is the existence of a common language. (It is true that in practice, the presence of an interpreter can provide, as it were, the common ground on which the conversation is based; but there must be some such common ground.) Until a few years ago it was almost axiomatic amongst Roman Catholics that no such common ground with Marxism existed—that dialogue was, therefore, impossible. And so the two camps—the Roman Catholic camp and the Marxist camp—took up positions of mutual exclusiveness and hostility.

But ever since Pope John XXIII issued his Encyclical on World Peace, the situation has altered profoundly. Not only does he refer to a passage in a previous Encyclical in which he calls on Catholics “to work loyally in the pursuit of objectives which are of their nature good or conducive to good”, but he goes on to insist on the importance of treating those with whom we may disagree on certain important points, as human beings:

The person who errs is always and above all, a human being, and he retains in every case his dignity as a human person; and he must be always regarded and treated in accordance with that high dignity. Besides in every human



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being there is an innate and inextinguishable need which drives him to pierce through the web of error and open his mind to the knowledge of truth . . . Meetings . . . between believers and those who do not believe or believe insufficiently . . . can be occasions for discovering truth and paying homage to it.

Nor should we infer from this passage that the Pope is thinking in terms of bringing the other side to appreciate the truth as we see it. He was, as we know, convinced of the value of dialogue as a way of leading *both* participants to a deeper understanding of the truth.

When we ask ourselves what is the common ground between the Catholic and the Marxist, the answer surely is "a common concern for human well-being". But this not only provides a common ground; it also explains why in the past there has been such a great divide between the two camps. For we have to admit that in the past, Catholics, along with other Christians, have failed to appreciate adequately the relevance of their religion to human well-being. All too often, through an exaggerated emphasis on the "other-worldliness" of the Christian religion, its followers have failed to recognise clearly the emphatic insistence by Christ Himself on the obligation we are all under to come to the help of our fellow man in all his needs.

It has to be admitted, too, that this failure on the part of too many Christians, coupled with the perennial effects of human selfishness, resulted in a situation in the so-called Christian countries of Europe which laid the way open for the success of the Marxist gospel. It is perfectly understandable that Marx and his followers down to the present day should have held religion itself responsible for the failures of its adherents. Moreover, the very fervour with which Marxists have mounted their attack on the social injustices which ensued from the failure of Christians to live up to their beliefs, has had the salutary effect of making Christians more fully conscious of their obligations in the ordinary field of economic and indus-

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trial relations. For this, we can express a genuine gratitude to those who have taught us such a lesson.

If we have dwelt on the failures of Christians in the past, it is because an appreciation of such failures may help us to a fuller understanding of the demands of the Christian faith. For whilst it is true that the Christian is committed to a belief in the transcendent qualities of human nature, whilst indeed he knows that "not by bread alone does Man live", he is, nevertheless, equally committed to the belief that Man's conduct on earth, his behaviour towards his fellow men, is of a cardinal importance in the judgement which will be passed on him.

This is hardly the place for a theological lecture, but no genuine understanding of Christianity is possible without a recognition that, in the doctrine of the Incarnation we are assured that all Man's concerns including his bodily needs are of importance to God Himself.

Whilst, therefore, so long as Marxism includes in its programme the attack on organised religion, there can clearly be no lasting agreement between the two systems, it is not merely possible, it is absolutely necessary for the achievement of their common objectives that they should arrive at a *modus vivendi*. It is gratifying to know that the change of climate initiated by John XXIII has already had practical results in semi-official meetings between Marxists and Christians to discuss common philosophical and sociological preoccupations. What is surely of more importance is that both sides should come together to collaborate in the practical work of solving the urgent problems of peace, disarmament and the alleviation of world hunger. But such common effort will be possible only if there is mutual understanding and mutual trust. We Christians must be prepared to recognise the honesty of purpose which inspires many of the followers of Marx and to see how much, on the purely practical level, we can share in their activities.

At the same time, of course, it would not be honest to fail to recognise the deep differences that separate us. So long as Marxism holds that the full meaning of Man's existence is to

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be found within temporal history, it is obvious that Christians must believe that it lacks the most important dimension in its thinking about human nature. Moreover, the Christian cannot but feel that a system which recognises no moral absolutes will be inclined to adopt methods for the achievement of its political ends which the Christian cannot approve.

It will, of course, be easy for the Marxist to retort that the Christian, whilst he professes certain moral absolutes, does at times behave in ways which belie these professions. This we Christians must recognise to be a valid criticism, and one which will perhaps encourage us to live up to our professions more completely. Certainly, there is much to be done by both of us in collaborating for the solution of the world's problems. All men today, whatever their nationality, their ideology or their religion live under a common terror—the threat of thermo-nuclear annihilation. Equally, they all live under a common hope—the hope that the scientific and technological developments of recent years will be applied not to destructive, but to constructive purposes. Not until the nations of the world have learnt to live together in something approaching mutual trust, can they hope to work together for their common purposes, and it would seem that the Christian vision of mankind as a true fraternity, a genuine family under a common Father is surely a more enduring basis on which to build a world society. Yet this vision will be a mere mirage unless it is translated into effective action at the practical level of economics, politics, culture and the like. It is at this practical level that we can all meet.

Yet such meeting at the practical level will not endure unless there is a true meeting of minds. It is surely not illusory to think that when men of intelligence, practical sense and genuine conviction about the value of their work come together in sincerity of purpose, this in itself will lead to a growth of mutual understanding and respect.

As an indication of the way in which recent thinking in the Catholic Church provides a genuine basis for dialogue with

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Marxism, the following quotations from John XXIII's Encyclical on World Peace are highly relevant. Speaking of the characteristics of the present day he says:

The working classes have gradually gained ground both economically and socially. They began by claiming their rights chiefly at the economic and social level; they then went on to establish their claim to political power; they finally applied themselves to the acquisition of the benefits of a more refined culture. Hence, today, workers all over the world refuse to be treated as if they were at the arbitrary disposition of others. They insist that they should always be regarded as human beings with a share in every sector of human society—in the sphere of economics, social activity, political life, learning and culture. . . .

Again with reference to the international field, the Pope speaks as follows of the end of the colonial age:

Since all nations have either achieved or are on the way to achieving independence there will soon no longer exist a world divided into ruling powers and people subject to them. Men all over the world have today, or will soon have, the rank of citizens in independent nations. . . . The conviction that all men are equal in virtue of their dignity as human beings has been generally accepted. Hence racial discrimination, at least as a theoretical notion, no longer wins acceptance. This is of fundamental importance for the establishment of human society based on the principles outlined above. . . .

When the relations between citizens are expressed in terms of rights and duties, men become conscious of spiritual values, come to understand the meaning of truth, justice, charity and freedom, and become conscious that they are members of a society based on these values.

There is surely nothing in these passages with which the most thorough-going Marxist would not find himself in agreement. The possibility of genuine dialogue is, therefore, manifest. May

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we hope that, as in the political sphere, the cold war has tended to thaw out, so in this larger world of basic human values, the hostility which has prevailed between Catholics and Marxists will rapidly disappear.

## D. B. RUNCORN

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**K**ARL MARX was a German Jew living for the latter part of his life in England. He has been described as the last of the great Hebrew prophets; a prophet without honour in his own country seeking an honour without profit in this country. His place of working—the British Museum, was perhaps symbolical of both his indebtedness to the past and the inspiration he drew from it and also his belief that history has meaning. His place of burial, Highgate, pointing to the fact that he believed he had a message for the future.

What was that message? "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Thus Marx believed that the events of this world have meaning and there is an answer to the question where will it all end. For later in the Manifesto Marx speaks of the class struggles nearing "the decisive hour". In other words history is working up to a climax—a Day of Judgment and the end of class struggles.

Here is the authentic message of the prophets coming to the surface—the messianic hope, the conviction that a glorious future awaits the chosen people, in this case the proletariat when the messianic age dawns. These future hopes are not based on reason and logic but are a tremendous act of faith. We may note in passing Christopher Hollis's observation that

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the reason why the Russians were the first to embrace Communism was because they are a profoundly messianic people.

There is nothing more powerful than the belief that one is moving with the tide of history and one can actually hasten the day of final triumph. This is what gripped Marx and the fact that his eschatology was entirely related to this world should cause no surprise as this is equally true of much thinking in the Old Testament.

The prophets would have agreed with Marx that history is to be taken seriously and that it is one of struggle, of tension and dialectic. Listen to that proletarian prophet Micah—"Woe to them that devise iniquity . . . they covet fields and seize them . . . they oppress a man and his house".

In the country the rich so often had almost the power of life and death; for the labourer's opportunities and means of work, his home, his standing ground were the property of one man. This is the state of wrong that Micah attacks. The increasing prosperity and wealth concentrated in the hands of the few was becoming a threat of extermination to the poor. Micah goes on to foretell God's judgment on these wicked landlords and how their property will be seized and appropriated. "In that day they will say 'we are utterly ruined . . . among our captors he divides our fields'."

Compare that with these words:

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; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is, the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society.

The Old Testament prophets believed that the history of all hitherto existing society is a history of struggle—a struggle between a working God and selfish men. This is a crass struggle

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for man cannot win. The earth is the Lord's not the landlords. Only God has the ultimate right to claim property as his own, to call it private. God's nature is always to give Himself and His things to man. Anything He gives man He expects him to share with other men and make it public and common.

The climax of God's self-giving was in the coming of Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. This was the Day of Judgment for the world—the decisive moment of history. The final struggle took place on Good Friday. To the world it seemed as if God was appropriated and then abolished. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose religion be it noted certainly did not make him submissive and helpless, for it was in a German prison that he ended his days, wrote these words:

God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing.

It is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us but by his weakness and suffering.<sup>1</sup>

This leads on to the saying of Marx that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point however is to change it". Theory and practice must go together. As Jesus said "Not everyone that says to me Lord Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Neither Marxism nor Christianity are under any illusions about the inherent greed and selfishness of man. This is the way we both look at the world and we long to see something done about it. Marx would have agreed with the earnest desire of the prophet Amos—"let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream".

How do we look at the world and how do we change it? We

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, S.C.M. Press, 1953.



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see it first of all as a world that God loves—"God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life" (St. John 3, v. 16). This is not theory; it has actually been demonstrated in history. This emphasises the point that God's revelation of himself is not to be found so much in nature or science but in history. The heart of Christianity is the saving acts of God in history—Jesus Christ born, died, buried, rose again the third day and appeared to his friends. Thus God was and is involved in the material things of this world. As William Temple used to say "Christianity is the most material of all religions." Thus man is not left to cope with his problems on his own. God in Jesus Christ loves all men. In the book *Pro-Existence*, Elizabeth Adler, an East German, has collected together sermons and addresses given by Christians in East Germany. One of them is entitled "Jesus Christ the God of the Godless". Here are three brief extracts from that address:

If anyone fights against God, he already suspects that he does exist after all—people do not go fighting when they do not really think there is anything there.

The positive thing about atheism is that a person who lives without God has abandoned any attempt to create an image of God and so at any rate does not run the risk of worshipping a caricature of him.

Jesus Christ is the God of the godless; He will not let go of the godless. That is how He became my God.<sup>1</sup>

In the beginning man was created perfect; the Bible pictures him in a garden where everything was lovely. That is the thesis. Then man was tempted to eat of the tree of life, that is to acquire the private ownership of the means of production and this led symbolically to the making of fig leaves. This was the antithesis for man could no longer face God and he had to

<sup>1</sup> *Pro-Existence Papers* edited by Elizabeth Adler, S.C.M. Press, 1964.

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leave the garden. From then onwards there were deep-set contradictions within man.

The climax of the dialectic struggle was the coming of Jesus Christ. It is through Him that a synthesis is achieved for we can become new people in Christ. This is the way the world is changed.

Is this "pie in the sky when you die"? No, it is pie NOW. Eternal life is not some vague thing in the remote future. It is something God offers us now and something which death cannot destroy. The new life in Christ involves a dying, a dying to self and not a clinging to life. It is seeing life as something on loan to us which we must ever be ready to give back. This daily surrender of self is pie now, that is eternal life.

Making sense of death in this way means a making sense of life; a reverence for death leads to a reverence for life. A reverence for such things as truth, beauty, kindness, love, a respect for one another and for personal relationships. Here in conclusion let a Christian in East Germany speak:

Two of them sat opposite me; an old Communist and a young one. I absolutely had to go to vote in a plebiscite "for peace". "So this plebiscite in which you want my vote 'for peace' also depends inseparably on faith in the truth of Lenin's 'Scientific socialism'?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you see, I don't have this faith."

It was almost breathtaking to see how the two of them reacted to this unexpected conclusion. They looked at me aghast.

"What, then, takes the place of this faith for you?"

And now began a three-hour conversation about obedience to God's law, about the reality of God, about our sinful hearts and the Church.

"How can God be real, if He is not material? Only material is real!"

I answered with the counter-question, whether the love (and trust) which he and his wife had for each other was real and whether it was material which he could prove by test

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and experiment. We agreed then that his concept of reality didn't even suffice to explain human beings and their relation to each other. He thought it over and put to me the surprising question: "But suppose I deny that love and trust between two people are realities?"

"Then," said I, "I am sorry for you in your marriage."

With this, the human being in him broke through: "You're right. Life would be nightmare then."

I showed him then that the whole of Marxism gives no answer to the question, what the death of a human being really is, and that therefore it cannot answer the question what a man is, because we exist only as men who die. Here lurks the real evil in our lives, for which Marxism offers no help.

In parting, the functionary, a young married worker, said to me: "Herr Pastor, I'll tell you frankly, this was my first encounter with the Church. You have told me things which concern me deeply. May I come to you again and hear more about Christianity?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Christian in E. Germany*. Johannes Hamel, S.C.M. Press, 1960.

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I BELIEVE the Marxist and the Christian need each other in the dialogue. This kind of encounter is essential for both if they are to understand their own beliefs and the practical relevance of these beliefs to the individual and to society. On the Continent there is more evidence of organised Marxist-Christian discussion than in Britain. I suggest that Marxists and Christians should give higher priority to the time and energy they devote to the dialogue. There is a favourable climate of opinion for fresh initiatives in encounter. Marxists and Christians who perceive the potential significance of the dialogue should not only themselves promote joint discussion but also interpret the dialogue to others within and without their own ranks.

One of the favourable signs for the dialogue is the recognition by both Christians and Marxists that an oversimplified, static view of the "other side" does not correspond with reality. An unsympathetic or cynical approach could exploit the differ-

<sup>1</sup> (Friends Home Service Committee, 6s.)

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ences within the Marxist and Christian worlds and widen ideological divisions. On the other hand, an acceptance and positive use of the diversity within both the Christian and Marxist traditions could enrich and deepen the dialogue. A willingness to explore this diversity would reveal uncomfortable differences. But it would also lead to points of mutual contact and understanding. A thorough examination of the wide spectrum of Christian outlook and practice would reveal much that was in sympathy with the profound social conscience of Marxism. Similarly, the Christian is ill-equipped for the dialogue unless he takes into account the various facets of Marxist-Leninist thought and society developing in different parts of the world. In particular, European Christians may give insufficient weight to the impact and relevance of Marxism-Leninism in more distant areas, such as Soviet Asia and China.

One of the important planes of encounter in the dialogue is ideological discussion. Here profound philosophical issues will be involved—questions about the nature and destiny of man and about the right ordering of society. It would, however, be regrettable if theoretical debate contributed an excessive ingredient to the substance of the dialogue. An examination of Marxist and Christian practice would inject a healthy realism into the exercise and would lessen the danger of that arid inflexibility which keeps discussion partners locked in an ideological cul-de-sac. Moreover, a balanced inclusion of practical issues in the dialogue would facilitate a wider range of participation and interest. Inevitably, the dialogue begins on a modest scale with pioneering groups from each side. But it is essential that the first small ripples of discussion should carry the momentum of widening circles of influence. Otherwise the dialogue will remain a rarified exercise for certain of the élite. The patience we need for the slow, initial steps should not weaken our resolve to share the fruits of the exercise as broadly as possible and draw others into a sense of involvement.

Marxism and Christianity touch each other at so many

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points that participants in the dialogue may find themselves overwhelmed in a mass of ill-defined material. A selective approach to subject matter may help to avoid such floundering. I suggest that one useful approach might be to concentrate on some ethical issues in which Marxists and Christians have a common interest. Such issues should not, of course, be treated in complete isolation from economic and political factors. There is, however, a danger that the non-Communist world concentrates so heavily on political and economic analysis of Marxist-Leninist society that it gives insufficient attention to moral questions. Christians following the dialogue should not only recall the strong ethical content in Marx's attack on capitalism and in his vision of the ideal society. They should note that within the "Communist" countries one can perceive indications which might justifiably encourage an interest in ethical trends. As examples one might quote the emphasis in the Soviet Union on the "New Man" and the "Moral Code of the Builders of Communism", as well as important ethical elements of Chinese Communist teaching including the qualities of character advocated in such contemporary patterns of morality for young people as Lei Feng and Wang Chieh.

Remembering the moral dilemmas of affluent society in the West and speculating on how much they may be shared as affluence spreads to Marxist-Leninist countries, we might explore the motivation of economic and social life in terms of moral assessment. Thus in choosing themes for the dialogue we could select from a whole range of related topics like the following: What have Marxism and Christianity to learn from each other about the ethical dangers of the acquisitive society? Are competition and the profit motive essential and can they be justified on moral grounds? What is our duty (both personal and in terms of social organisation) to the hungry, poor and under-privileged within and without our own groups and national societies? How do we promote a purposeful sense of belonging to a community? How can class and work barriers be overcome? What are the best ways of assuring to women

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their rightful place in social organisation? What is the ethical role of public entertainment, leisure and advertising? What is our moral duty in the reform and rehabilitation of prisoners? There are many other important moral problems relevant to the dialogue. In this context we might, for example, go on to explore queries such as these: How far is the purpose and destiny of the individual man adequately expressed in terms of the good society? Are free activity and expression of opinion by minorities essential to a healthy social order? What moral priority do we give to the unfettered exchange of ideas and opinion? Do hatred and intolerance have a positive role in the community? What are the moral limits on the use of power to achieve political and social ends?

Much depends on the atmosphere of the dialogue. The exercise will be superficial unless there is frank and open comment. We should not skim over differences, and critical analysis must have its place. But the dialogue becomes sterile if envisaged as a contest in which one side concentrates on attacking, crushing or exploiting the other. The search for common ground is helped by a readiness to listen and learn, an openness to new truth. It is not enough to display a reluctant patience with the assessments we make of each other's positions. Let us recognise that such assessments can provide a creative if, at times, painful contribution. They do more than add to the common pool of knowledge and understanding in the dialogue. If conducted sympathetically, these attempts at assessment can bring fresh light and stimulus to both observer and observed. Respect for the partner in the dialogue is important and also willingness to perceive positive aspects in him as a person and in his ideas. The exchange of comments through written contributions can make a major contribution to the dialogue. However, the kind of atmosphere described here is best achieved in personal encounter. Much helpful encounter in this field should take place outside the framework of a pre-arranged dialogue. This is, of course, no argument against Marxists and Christians arranging carefully planned initiatives.

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Yet the dialogue is much more than a matter of careful organisation. Those coming to it bring with them the fruit of their own and others' experience, research and meditation. In spite of much study already accomplished and in progress, the gaps in mutual knowledge are likely to be among the most formidable handicaps in these encounters. From the Christian side, for example, I would like to see much greater attention to the study of such themes as the "New Man" in Marxist-Leninist society. It would help an informed participation in the dialogue if church training and study centres gave more prominence in their curricula to Marxism-Leninism. Such institutions could directly contribute to the Marxist-Leninist encounter by inviting a Marxist speaker to introduce discussions. One would hope that Marxists might feel able to issue reciprocal invitations. We cannot expect swift or consistent progress here, especially if the encounter is envisaged from an international perspective. Practical and emotional inhibitions are involved and widely varying conditions in different countries must be taken into account.

It is natural to think of the dialogue as a purely verbal encounter. Discussion is, indeed, an important part of the exercise, but it need not be the only level of communication. Those experienced in attempts at practical partnership between Communists and non-Communists are well aware of the problem of maintaining the right blend of co-operation, goodwill and mutual respect for independence. Working together has its special pitfalls in the political field, although these pitfalls do not mean that we should *a priori* dismiss the possibility of such co-operation. Perhaps a specially valuable contribution to the dialogue can be made when Marxists and Christians join in some task involving manual labour for the benefit of the community. A sense of co-operative involvement in the "work camp" type of assignment can help create the right atmosphere for the dialogue. The kind of work-study project which includes participants from Eastern Europe, and in which Quakers have taken a lively interest, should provide



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useful experience and stimulus for further initiatives in this type of communication.

We can only respond creatively to the tensions of the dialogue if we face realistically the frustrations and thorns of ideological encounter. We must reckon not only with encouraging bridges but also with daunting gulfs. In patience and humility we need to acknowledge that ignorance and unimaginative rigidity are not confined to any particular group. But the time seems propitious for bold initiatives as we reach out to our partners in the dialogue. Loyal to the best in ourselves, may we also seek and enrich the best in each other.

## ALAN ECCLESTONE

(Alan Ecclestone was a Lecturer in English at the University of Durham from 1927-30. He was ordained in 1931, was Vicar of Frizington, Cumberland, 1936-43, a "depressed area" parish in the iron-ore mining district. From 1942 to date he has been Vicar of Darnall. He joined the Communist Party in March 1948)

IT was desirable that *Marxism Today* should give ample opportunity to contributors on this subject. Such discussion in Great Britain was long overdue and the fact that a good deal of genuine dialogue had already gone on in Continental circles as John Lewis pointed out, and several important books been published, made the subject a timely one. Articles in *World Marxist Review*, already referred to in this discussion, were pointers in the same direction.

But I must confess to some misgivings, as I read on from month to month, that genuine dialogue is not being achieved. We are getting a series of statements from various points of view—Roman Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical Protestant, Platonist—but not enough wrestling with "neuralgic points", not even enough firm delineation of the points themselves. The loose ends of assertion are becoming so many and so various that the whole issue is in danger of being hopelessly confused.

To begin with, a detailed re-examination of John Lewis's eight points made in the March issue of *Marxism Today* is called for. There are good reasons for questioning their adequacy as a sufficient basis for fruitful discussion of the subject. John Lewis

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recognises, for example, that religion is the "recognition of the sacred, either in the 'numinous' or the mystical or the sacramental on the one hand, or in the demands which the needs of our fellow-men present to our impulse to pity and fellowship on the other", but he does not seriously examine the nature and implications of this Hydra-headed phenomenon nor suggest that it is most important for Marxists to do so in concert with Christians. But surely it is precisely at this point—the discussion of the very nature of religion in general and Christianity in particular from sociological, historical, psychological and ethical angles—that we need far more work to be done. "Our impulse to fellowship"—what exactly does this mean? Will religion construed in these terms continue, develop new forms, contribute to world culture? I am not suggesting that John Lewis has not thought deeply about this question, but I think he has understated it. It calls for much more attention. H. J. Blackham's *Religion in Modern Society* opens up a field in which it is most desirable that Marxists should contribute fully. It is important that Christian theology should be subjected to philosophical criticism as well by Marxists as by any other school of thought, and there is not enough of it. Criticism is raging like a forest fire inside Christian circles in any case, and in so far as Christians and Marxists are concerned with the pursuit of truth, every critique that can be adduced is valuable and to be welcomed. Of course the demands for common action in progressive struggles should be in the forefront and a good deal of the sectarianism of the past should be excised; of course diversionary controversies should be avoided, but there is still considerable room for more knowledgeable, more detailed and more workmanlike Marxist criticism of religion. Even as exegesis on the occasional comments made by Marx on the subject there is much to be done.

Father Corbishley is right, so far, in saying that the "basis of dialogue is the true meeting of minds"—but this calls for some amplification. Professor John Macquarrie in his book *The Scope of Demythologising* has put it better:

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To be fruitful, a dialogue needs contributions from both sides, and it must begin on the assumption that both sides have something to offer. The possibility of such a dialogue is destroyed if the theologian begins on the assumption that he has the monopoly of the truth; it is equally destroyed if the philosopher begins with the assumption that the theologian has nothing worthwhile to contribute. There is a possibility of a genuine conversation when theologians and philosophers find a zone of common interest upon which light can be thrown from both sides to the benefit of both disciplines.

It has been expressed in a somewhat different way by Roger Garaudy: "The future of man cannot be constructed in opposition to believers nor without them; the future of man cannot be constructed in opposition to communists nor without them," and he has gone further to write that the dialogue must take the form of "a search on both our parts to discover the fundamental components in that which gives meaning and value to our lives, whether in Christianity or in Marxism." (Quoted in the *Teilhard Review* from "De l'Anathème au Dialogue: un Marxiste s'adresse au Concile".) It is of interest that Garaudy sees in the work of Teilhard de Chardin two decisive affirmations—the autonomy of science and a radical moral optimism—which offer considerable ground for dialogue.

Now the definition or description of the "common interest" and its subsequent analysis in terms of the two disciplines must be much more rigorously specific than D. B. Runcorn permits himself to be in his article in the September 1966 number of *Marxism Today*, or we shall be lost in vague generalisations. He writes: "Anything He (God) gives man He expects him to share with other men and make it public and common." Good, but what exactly does this mean? Common ownership of the means of production and wealth produced, profit sharing, equal opportunities for education, health and leisure? Why not be specific and particular? "Theory and

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practice must go together." Good, but what in practice are we to commit ourselves to in this proclamation and pursuit of common sharing? What exactly do we set about doing? "God's revelation of himself is not to be found so much in nature or science but in history"—well, the value of the comparison is open to question, but the reference to history is made suspect when it is illustrated by the words "The saving acts of God in history—Jesus Christ born, died, buried, rose again the third day and appeared to his friends". Where exactly is the common ground to be found if out of the whole course of history—history in which we are all immediately involved in the day to day events of the world—the one item selected is one whose historicity is not even accepted wholly by all Christian theologians and one presented in terms loaded with theological implications?

I am not denying the reality of the historical Jesus but I am questioning the wisdom of trying to begin a discussion in the field of history on a matter where the only documents available do not supply the needed data and were written for wholly other purposes. We should be on difficult enough but more promising ground if we took up the subject of God and History in relation to, say, the Industrial Revolution. The Papal Encyclical "Pacem in Terris" was much more deliberately "earthed" in its recognition of the current world movement to new levels of social welfare and new assertions of national independence.

When, further, Mr. Runcorn asks "How do we look at the world and how do we change it?", he answers his question in theological terms but gives no clue whatever to an awareness of the need to restate these in non-theological terms. We may very well ask whether such a thing can be done. If it cannot, the possibility of dialogue would seem to be at an end, and this is in fact what frequently happens if sufficient trouble be not taken to reach the non-theologically equipped person. Of course it's difficult, but the effort must be made. John Macquarrie has given a good example of the problem,

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describing how he was asked to talk, as a theologian, to a university leaders' conference including scientists, classicists, lawyers and medical men, and at the conclusion of his paper heard a physicist say: "The speaker was quite intelligible until he introduced the word 'God' into his talk. This word does not stand for anything within my range of concepts or experience, and so every sentence in which it was used was to me meaningless and the whole paper became unintelligible."

Macquarrie was grateful for the come-back and recognised that "in a secular age one may not assume that language about God affords a universally intelligible starting point for the interpretation of the Christian faith". He therefore addressed himself to the problem by beginning with Man. Man offers possibilities of common ground, God does not. My own experience over several years of talking to mixed audiences about Christianity and Communism confirms this point and emphasises the need to search for the common ground. Unless and until we do discover such ground, the talk about changing the world is likely to be left quite unrelated to political and social action and programmes and plans, and only leave the two sides more suspicious of each other than before. Why not try to say explicitly—if we are to have any discussion about change "this is what I think is called for—this is what I am prepared to do", for then we have solid ground for discussing the relevance, adequacy and value of the suggestion? It was exactly this that Marx insisted on, as Mr. Runcorn admits. I feel that many Marxists have a justifiable suspicion that the failure to be explicit in terms of political commitment creeps far too easily into these discussions.

I have been a little perplexed to notice that in the contributions so far printed on this subject, little or no use has been made of the work of John MacMurray, the one outstanding British Christian philosopher who has addressed himself to the problem throughout a long life. His essay "Christianity and Communism" which concluded the volume "Christianity and the Social Revolution" (1935) was an early

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indication of his profound understanding of the questions at issue, of the common ground to be utilised, and indeed has hardly been improved on since. In later works like the "Clue to History" and his Gifford lectures "The Self as Agent" and "Persons in Relation" he has developed in great detail the implications of the subject. Quite recently in a small book describing his life-work he wrote that "the study of Communism was a *necessary prelude* to the understanding of Christianity", and "to the understanding of the reasons behind Marx's rejection of religion". I believe that full discussion of these statements would bring us to the heart of common ground, just as I believe that MacMurray's grasp of the dialectical movement in human affairs described in the "Clue to History" brings us face to face with the central problem of historical materialism.

MacMurray has chosen throughout to be quite explicit about the nature of religion. "Religion is about the community of persons," he says, "and Liberty, Equality, Fraternity is an adequate definition of community—of the self-realisation of persons in relation . . .". He has as explicitly stated "that Marx's criticism of religion, which, he himself insists is the beginning of all social criticism, is almost grotesquely unscientific and *a priori*", pointing out that the religion of Marx's own Jewish ancestors was not in the least idealistic but materialist, showing no interest in any other world but entirely concerned with the right way to maintain a human community in this world. The chief point at issue is this nature of religion and MacMurray has persisted in defining the Judaic-Christian intention in material terms, in terms of community here and now. He has based his assertion throughout on the Hebrew refusal to permit a dualistic mode of thought to convert this down-to-earth religion into idealism. "The Hebrew form of thought rebels against the very idea of a distinction between the secular and the religious aspects of life. It demands the synthesis of action and reflection."

The penetration of Christian consciousness by dualistic

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thought, perfectly expressed in Canon Adam Fox's article in the July issue of *Marxism Today* ("My view of the world about us is in one sentence that it is not the real world"), was in MacMurray's view, the primary, in terms of time and importance, perversion of the basic religious consciousness of the Christian Church. It opened the door for the distinction between material and spiritual, body and soul, this world and a Heaven hereafter—with which we have been plagued ever since and against which Marx so valiantly contended. But the battle is on and the allies in a common struggle are being drawn together. The battle in the Church is one episode of the battle in the world—for the liberation of man and for the speeding of his Long March with increased courage and profounder grasp of his job.



## ADRIAN CUNNINGHAM

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COMING towards the end of a discussion has its advantages, but reading Alan Ecclestone's piece I began to wonder if I had not left my long-delayed contribution a bit too late. For I too had the same misgivings as the series developed that mutual politeness and enthusiasm was doing service for the real work needed, that attempts at dialogue could easily become merely a swapping of travelogues, brisk and breezy glimpses of far horizons without the energy and seriousness required for their conquest. If the dialogue is to be fruitful then the first danger to be watched against is an over-optimistic expectation of immediate results, especially in Britain, and a consequent disillusionment. It would be best perhaps to see this series as a rough prolegomena, a preliminary survey of the field which would not be expected to yield any very definite conclusions. I shall thus limit myself to a few observations which may clarify where later work might best situate itself.

Alan Ecclestone makes exactly the points about the importance of John MacMurray's work which I should have attempted, for it is certainly one of the best places for Christians to start their thinking about the socialist implica-

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tions of Christianity, and one of the places where some of the "neuralgic points" for dialogue can be found by both sides, and an indication of the possible common ground. Almost as interesting as the work itself, however, is its neglect.

For MacMurray's work most directly related to the relations between Marxism and Christianity was published thirty years ago. And not only his work; around the same time there were signs of a significant and sustained interest on the Christian side—from some of the German religious socialists who fled Nazi dictatorship, the most notable and still relevant of them being Paul Tillich; from a quite different position there was (for a while at least) the American Reinhold Niebuhr, and from France the collection of essays by Berdyaev, Mauriac and others—"Communism and Christianity".

Anyone going back over these and the many other books and articles published cannot but be surprised at the amount of interest and the number of really interesting studies among the more ephemeral. But this period closes with the 1930s, and part of the reason for the decline is to be associated with the general movement of the times. Again, in the late 1940s and early 1950s there is another crop of books, though this time of a less obviously sympathetic kind and of a generally lower standard, and again it peters out. I think if we trace attempts at understanding back to the crucial period of the 1840s when Marx, Feuerbach and Kierkegaard were formulating what have remained among our principle preoccupations—socialism, the secularisation of religion, existentialism and phenomenology—the same pattern will be found. Not only periodic interest at both practical and theoretical levels, though always confined to a minority, but also and more worryingly a repetition of many of the same lines of approach, difficulty and possibility at each point. The discussion seems to have gone round and round each time, starting afresh with no real sense of continuity.

One element in this circularity has been that until recently socialists have been, on the whole understandably, not very

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interested in the Christians either as socialists or interested sympathisers and have had the awkward task of working on their own. Also, until the last few years the positions of Socialists and Christians and more especially Communists and Catholics, were rarely anything but overtly and bitterly hostile. To put it at its most crudely realistic level, I see the present tentative openings springing initially from the realisation that neither side can hope to submerge the other (and to put it even lower, one might have to add, not yet anyway). The places where interest has been strongest are Italy and France, where it is being realised that any hope for a strong and stable socialist majority must include some substantial support from Catholics, and Spain where both Church and party are seeking some sort of *modus vivendi* for the period after Franco when it is at least conceivable that either could go under. Some of the long-term material influences on the Catholic side are the simple failure of anti-communism even to preserve a pseudo-identity for a religion which has steadily lost the support of the working classes; the general re-thinking of function as traditional missionary structures break under progressive decolonisation; the increase of indigenous "progressive" clergy in the Third World; the partial decomposition of many of the traditional overtly reactionary social forces aligned with the Church; and lastly, the hesitant relaxation of relations with East Europe in the post-Stalin era.

Precisely because of this material shift of the two groups, the pressure in at least some areas to come to terms with one another, we have for the first time the objective possibility of progress. At the same time the fact that this is a pressure and not some kind of impossible miraculous mutual enthusiasm should lead us to expect at the practical level a fair number of ups and downs, opportunist temptations and set-backs on both sides. To think otherwise is utopian. The important thing is that on at least some fronts discussion should still be possible and cumulative. Whether it is a Communist attack on Catholics in the East, or a Catholic attack on Communists in

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Latin America which is taking place, the new situation and the convergence of aim that might be theoretically established will I hope make maintenance of open contact at some levels easy.

This raises a further point: the distinction between theoretical dialogue and practical relaxation and possible co-operation. Of course, both sides should be committed to seeing theory and practice as a dialectical unity, but precisely because the unity is dialectical it will obviously not be uniform at every time and place: indeed it is the mistaken attempt at uniformity which has often been disastrous for both groups in their own ways.

While it is quite possible to use Marxism and Christianity as generic terms, any useful thinking about their possible relationship will always have to specify particular times, places, situations, people. For example, one would need to bear in mind the different traditions, histories, organisational structures, and theological emphases of the various Christian denominations. Or to take just the Catholic Church, its *Weltanschauung* and social role will be clearly very different in the GDR, Spain, Chile or Ceylon—and within each country the disposition of social forces within the Church will vary. France has had a varied tradition of Catholic movements of the left for over a century. Britain has not. In each case the kind of dialogue possible or desirable will necessarily vary.

And the same is true of the other partners in the dialogue. There are a variety of Marxist traditions and contemporary positions often mutually hostile but all with claims to being revolutionary socialists, and Christians will, like other people, vary with respect to which grouping, tradition or party they find themselves closest. With each particular grouping further discriminations need to be made. To take the Communist Party, there is a major difference between its role in the East European states and in those states where it is an oppositional or minority force; and it will again vary with particular historical-social situations, or with regard to its relations with

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the Eastern European Communist Parties. It might for example be an important fact that the major interest in dialogue has come from Italy and France where quite large elements in the Party have over the last few years adopted a critical attitude towards Eastern Europe. My own response would vary accordingly: in South Africa the obvious place for the Christian might be in the CP, in France and Italy there might be a close association, yet in Hungary—as a Socialist and not necessarily as a Catholic—my beliefs would be hostile to the party.

To make this more specific still, in Eastern Europe I would myself see dialogue as primarily pragmatic, a set of collisions and confusions between government and church apparatus (exacerbated by conditions of industrialisation where the church is basically peasant orientated) which have to be adjusted for the sake of both sides. Yet I would be equally critical of both sides; from my own point of view the governments are very vulnerable to radical socialist criticism, and the Church is often little more than an unchristian social anachronism. I would certainly want to help in any dialogue that was possible, but, for the time being at least, being quite clear that the overall situation was one which both as a Socialist and as a Christian I had to oppose. In fact in some of the socialist countries, the left minority among the Christians and the left wing (though I suppose we might disagree about this!) of the party find they sometimes have more in common with one another than either has with its official apparatus. This kind of attention to specific factors must be kept in mind if dialogue is to be fruitful.

What then of the situation in Britain? We should all have enough in common to need no summary here of the specific political problems of the left in the world's oldest capitalist country, of the massive cultural drag on the combative ability of socialism. The Christian position however needs one point particularly to be stressed: Britain has never had a Christian Democrat party or a Christian trade union structure. Thank

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God! is the only possible reaction. But there are at least two consequences which make dialogue here very different from almost anywhere else. First, Christians are basically and officially apolitical; the churches certainly play an important political role of a stabilising conservative kind, but the level of political consciousness as such is very low indeed. Without identifiable Christian political structures you do not get that polarisation of Christian political thinking and action which occurs, for example, in France. So the first, rather dismal problem of a Christian who is a Socialist is the arousing of political consciousness; he is not able to take it for granted and move more quickly to political action. (There may possibly be some advantages in this situation: the existence of a Christian Democrat party in Germany has not led to any significant polarisation within the churches; there it may even have worked in the opposite direction.) The second consequence is that it is thus very difficult to see what practical content dialogue can have; there is not a Christian political structure with which Marxists can co-operate to do anything. As I see it, dialogue in Britain will refer for its practical content to its wider connexion with the dialogue going on elsewhere, and the major effort here will necessarily be of a largely philosophical or theoretical kind.

This need not however be merely eclectic, for there are problems which both groups analogously share. One with some practical application is the lack in Britain of any serious study of the sociology of religion or even more importantly its cultural and ideological history. A major failure of Marxist thinking can I think be located here: its view of religion even as secular fact is massively over-simplified; religion is usually disposed of as idealist projection, in intolerable situations, or as the mystifying veil of respectability thrown over capitalist society.<sup>1</sup> Certainly this has and does play some part in many

<sup>1</sup> I've always liked the polemical shaft in the *Communist Manifesto*, "Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat".

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forms of religious belief, but the point has little use as an analytical instrument in such a general form. For example, the fact that a Church (especially catholicism) may often be completely heterogeneous in its class composition would frustrate any attempt to analyse it in straightforward basis-superstructure fashion: the question of the relative autonomy of ideologies is raised, and the problem of the mediations between the various forces at work, and the variety and respective weight of those forces—class, individual and group psychology, social aspiration, historical background, unconscious mystification, etc.

In a different context Mike Long's apparent belief in the possibility of an unmediated relationship between man and nature, which I thought had gone out with Feuerbach, points to the same crux in Marxism over mediations. To analyse collaboratively the actual role of religious beliefs and organisations in society in detail would be of obvious use to both sides, and would raise for examination and possible resolution some awkward points of Marxist analysis.

Other focuses for dialogue might be found in a disciplined approach to common problems of teleology or eschatology. In Marxist terms: is not objectivation often covertly subsumed in alienation, so that the end of alienation is presented as the end of the conflict inherent in objectivation? That is if dialectical movement stops then there are no human beings, and if it does not but is endless then every stage is merely relative to the next and the "final goal" does not exist. Yet much Marxist theory and moral energy seems to me dependent upon the idea of achieving this end; how does one re-think this if the goal constantly recedes: complete relativism would seem to castrate the energy and point of struggle; and also there is no inherent reason why each stage should not be reversible. Analogous problems exist for the Christian with reference to the kingdom of God: (whether it is conceived of as in this world, or somewhere else) if salvation is equally possible in every age then why is it important that the kingdom be built

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through history? Perhaps both sets of problems could be related to the question of dialectical movement, whether this is a linear movement from a dialectic of nature to the human, which is basically a reflection of the natural, or whether dialectical movement is primarily a human phenomenon, and the discontinuity of man and nature more important, as the Christian would believe.

A third possibility would be to work on the question of belief. This is clearly a major, perhaps the major problem of any Christian belief, but it does have Marxist analogies; that is Communists often seem to be surprised when I ask them *why* they are Communists, and no amount of talk about the inevitability of Communism is relevant to the mysterious nature of their fundamental belief, choice, option or wager.

On these three topics what might emerge is a fruitful relationship between the historical analytic, which is best represented by Marxism and the more existential orientation of much Christian thought, for they all involve problems of mediation—between social historical forces, ideological cultural formations, and personal and group values and reciprocities and goals. The point of a dialogue is not meant to be conversion, but an essential part of it is a willingness to expect change within as well as between the groups involved. Approaches to what one might call a group-historical-existential perspective would seem to me both good Marxism and good Christianity.



## PAUL OESTREICHER

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**W**ILLIAM BLAKE was neither an orthodox Socialist nor an orthodox Christian. He was a visionary. An artist. Accordingly he did not try to imprison truth in the intellectual concepts of doctrine. *The vision* is true and remains true as long as it is lived. The moment it is enshrined it is robbed of its dynamism and is at best a static representation of truth. Both the Christian Church and the Communist Movement have been guilty of the dogmatism that dehumanises reality.

In *Jerusalem*, Blake wrote: "Are not politics and religion the same thing? Brotherhood is religion". I am prepared to state quite simply that these two propositions, naïve perhaps, are as true as any formulation can be. At any rate they are true if "religion" is assumed to be the Christian faith. Yet, paradoxically, the history of the Christian Church appears to be, and largely is, the affirmation of almost the exact opposite. The institutional Church has for centuries managed to deny the essential humanity of its mission. Where that mission has

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been effectively lived, then it has generally been done in spite of and not because of established religion. I speak, in this context, unhesitatingly of the apostasy of the Church. At the same time there has always been a clear historic witness of the "humanity of God" both inside and outside religious structures. Sociologically this has, however, been a minority phenomenon. It is therefore my contention that the Marxist analysis of religion (mainly Christian) based on observed history is, broadly speaking, right. There can, therefore, be no creative dialogue between Marxists and Christians until the latter make this far-reaching "concession". In reality it is not a concession at all; it is, for Christians, a prerequisite for the practice of the faith at all. Theologically, it is the penitence without which the Church (judged by its own criteria) is dead.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a deeply religious man, came to see in a Nazi prison shortly before his execution that religion, even presumably his own, could be a serious impediment to that total solidarity with humanity for which Jesus of Nazareth stands. That total solidarity was the content of Blake's vision. Blake restored the word religion to its proper human dignity. Bonhoeffer perhaps despaired of this possibility when he put forward the proposition of "religionless Christianity" as something necessary for mature man, man "come of age". The concept has become something of an intellectual plaything for "with it" theologians who, by and large, have shied away from the radical social and political implications not only of Bonhoeffer's thought but of his life. It must be remembered that Bonhoeffer did not die as a "religious" martyr, insisting on the purity of religion and the inviolability of the Church. He died as a political plotter, a party to the plan to murder Hitler. In this he was much closer to many Communists than to most Christians. If I were asked to name a "Bonhoeffer of the present moment" it would be Abram Fischer, in his South African prison.

Nor will vague Christian recognition that the Church has not lived up to its beliefs do. The penitence of the Church

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must become much more concrete. The idea of "let bygones be bygones" is a Christian impossibility, however tactically desirable. Anyway, it is psychological nonsense. One example of what I have in mind will suffice. In Germany the first victims of Nazi terror were Communists. Their martyrdom began even before that of the Jews. In the face of this persecution the Church remained totally silent. Not a finger was raised. Many of the silent Christians nodded their heads, a few shook theirs: which, either way, to a man being beaten is totally irrelevant. In the words of Christian tradition the Church "passed by on the other side". Anyone who believes that this is irrelevant to the present dialogue is both devoid of human sensitivity and, apart from that, a fool.

The only proper and possible subject of the dialogue is man, the double question: what do men need and how are they to get it? And that will inevitably force us to ask ourselves: how must we change if this is to happen? The Christian technical term for this is "repentance". If repentance does not mean radical self-criticism (and change), personal and corporate, it is irrelevant and just another facet of pietist escapism.

It is relatively unimportant whether, in the dialogue (which only means anything if it is accompanied by or at least followed by joint political action) religion is reinstated and used in Blake's sense (in defiance of history) or whether we operate with the concept of a religionless faith. I am torn between the two and like Christians, Communists will have to learn to live with this terminological problem. Meanwhile, Christians must come to terms with the fact that phenomenologically their religion is still partly what Marx thought it was and is also partly an ally of humanity. The distinction is that between true faith and false faith.

It is not "ideological imperialism" on the part of Christians to insist that Marxism is (at least in part) a product of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But it is not, as some Christians would have it, a heresy. It is a corrective. Our common roots are inescapable. They are the one element in the dialogue that

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makes it easier than many assume. Justice for man is our common objective. And in addition we share the certainty that it is achievable. Yet in very different ways we have, on both sides, distorted that certainty almost beyond recognition.

Dialectical thinking in both camps (Christians have tended to call it casuistry) has been used as a pretext to justify almost any distortion. We have both, in practice, denied our optimistic and justified hopes for man. We must both, in the dialogue, work towards the restoration of our vision for man and of man. Traditionally, Christians have, in this context, spoken of the Kingdom of God. Marxists, more simply, have spoken of Communism. When, one day, they are seen to be very nearly the same thing, the dialogue will have reached its proper conclusion. It will be both a "scientific" and a "faithful" path that leads to that end. But meanwhile both terms, if insisted on too rigidly, will hinder rather than help us on a generally uncharted voyage.

I have spoken of certain Christian prerequisites for the dialogue, foremost among them the need for radical self-examination. It is not for Christians to demand it, but progress is not likely unless Marxists are prepared to eat similar humble pie. It is obvious that in the short history of Marxist practice—which means Marxist power—there have been, and still are, plenty of black spots. No more and no less than honesty is called for from both sides. Neither dialectics nor casuistry are adequate "get outs". And when I speak of black spots I do not of course imply a need for self-denigration. The black spots simply illustrate our considerable failure to reconcile theory and practice. The crusades and the inquisition were perversions of Christianity; as Stalinism was a perversion of Marxism. Wherever these and related phenomena remain, the dialogue cannot proceed while ignoring these facts.

A splendid example of this occurred at a meeting of Christians and Marxists which I attended last year. A young Marxist philosopher from one of the People's Democracies spoke movingly on why he gave political support to the Party

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in his country. As soon as his address was over an even younger Western Christian who had recently visited the speaker's country began to throw in the speaker's face a whole catalogue of abuses he had discovered, not vague abuses, but concrete examples of injustice being suffered by many people known to him personally. Before the indignant young Christian who wanted to know how all this could be squared with the speaker's conscience and humanistic ideals had ended speaking, he was interrupted by the Christian chairman: "This," he was told, "is not part of dialogue. What if our Marxist friends were to begin telling us of all the unjust suffering being caused in Spain and elsewhere by Christians?"—and there, publicly, the matter rested. But the young philosopher had merely been too polite to rebuke the Chairman. Privately he regretted the termination of this challenge. "If," he said privately, "we are not prepared to face questions like this squarely, then the dialogue is an intellectual luxury which we can ill afford." He was right. We must be prepared to see ourselves through the eyes of others—and to accept the truth, however much it hurts.

If we are prepared to do that both the Church and the Party will be strengthened. But what is much more important: humanity will have won a victory in the process, because the object of all this must be the genuine advancement of man.

I believe that once we learn to trust each other we shall find that we can go a long way together. We shall sometimes divide, but not always with all the Christians on one side and all the Communists on the other. We all believe that it is our business to co-operate with true humanity in changing the world. We may find that our greatest difficulties arise over means rather than ends. It is at that point that Christianity may have a unique contribution to make by being uncompromisingly humanistic. What I mean is that the humanity of God in Christ implies the limitless value of every human being. No man may therefore ever be used as a mere means to achieving a better hypothetical future for all men: but that lands us right

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into the dialogue itself—the meaning and purpose of man, and beyond man, of creation itself.

My constant concern is that this necessary philosophic wrestling must remain rooted in human reality. If, for instance, Christians and Communists are not together concerned with finding a tolerably just *end* to the fighting in Vietnam, they deserve little sympathy. Equally, if some Christians in their newly discovered spirit of comradeship with “friendly” Communists forget about their “revisionist” comrades rotting away in some jail, the exercise is degrading. It is one of my own happier memories to have been able to make some small contribution to the release of a socialist prisoner. In the process I was asked by a prominent ruling Communist why I was so interested in securing the release of a man who was surely no friend of the Church. My reply: because he is a *man*. I know that Communist friends have done as much for Christians.

This commitment to the personal dimensions of humanity is an inescapable necessity. But not at the price of political realism. The two do not clash even though the tension between them may at times be hard to bear. What I am sure of is that no man may ever be sacrificed to the demands of any theory. If the theory does demand this, it is, to that extent, wrong. Ideals must never dominate men. For that reason I believe Marxism and Christianity both rightly deny that they are idealistic. They both claim to be realistic—and true. But the word truth begs too many questions to be used lightly.

The most weighty objections to both Christianity and Marxism come from those who claim that neither allow for man's real depravity. Christians certainly give it a high theoretical place by constructing an edifice around sin and its conquest—but thereby they ultimately appear to be theologising it away. Marxists, too, “allow” for it as a passing economically conditioned phase. But neither, I believe, can really explain man's irrational inhumanity to man. The challenge to us both is: can we *end* it, or at least begin to end it?

We shall need to harness all the skills of economic theory, of

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technology, of psychology, and of science at every level to restore the family of man. And we shall need to activate immense new dimensions of love. All this, both for Christians and Marxists, implies struggle. We shall need to discover the nature of that struggle. Christians would need to deny that that struggle need be (or perhaps even could be) violent. It is a struggle for all men, even for man's opponents. How to express this is no easy task. It is, for example, obviously a struggle for South Africa's white people as much as for the black. The paradox is that if these white people are not frustrated in their present policies, they are doomed. To defeat a man for his own good is no easy concept to *practise*. It does seem to me that the phrase *pro-existence* coined by Christians in East Germany is better than mere *co-existence*. In the one case no more than live and let live (and sometimes less) is posited. In the other life is assumed to be *for others*.

All the while I have not ventured beyond this world. For this I make no apology. It is not because my readers are likely to be mainly atheists. It is because Jesus should have left His Church in no doubt that love of men is our only legitimate business. Loving God is only possible by loving men. "What you do—or fail to do—for a man, you do—or fail to do—for God." And that puts believers and non-believers completely on a level. Actions alone count. Theories are only relevant if they lead to action—*for men*. This world is the only possible place for such action. If our theories (whether we claim them to be divine or scientific) impede such action, we must change them. Each in our "camp", if we are afraid to be called "heretics" or "revisionists", we shall possibly make little progress. However "open" we think we are, dogmatism remains our temptation because dogma can cover up a multitude of contradictions.

And we shall need to learn each other's intolerable jargon. That in itself might hasten some essential demythologising on both sides. And all the while we need to remember that most people are neither Christians nor Marxists. They are hungry.

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In case we think we know the answers or even the right questions we could do worse than listen to Bertolt Brecht who loathed glib words. With Marx—and Christ—he believed in a good end for man. He knew too that it will need to be of our making. At the end of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (in itself a tremendous “Christian-Marxist” dialogue) Brecht says:

We are deflated, nettled, to see the curtain down, and nothing settled. How could a better ending be arranged? Can we change man? Or can the world be changed? Will new gods do the trick? Or none? Would that we knew. We don't! So work it out yourself, my friend: how do we help a good man to a happy end? You go and write the ending to this play. A good one there must be; there's *got* to be a way.

We shall find the way, I believe, by setting out on it together—in hope.



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(Editor of "*Marxism Today*", theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain)

WHEN, some eighteen months ago, our discussion opened in *Marxism Today*, the Christian-Marxist dialogue, which was already well under way in countries like Italy, France and Spain, had hardly opened in Britain. Some thought that there was little basis for it.

Since then the pessimists have been confounded. In many different forms and different places it has been gathering force in Britain too.

Last October, for instance, the dialogue became a central topic of discussion at the initial Conference of the Teilhard de Chardin Association of Great Britain and Ireland. And in the St. Pancras Town Hall, an audience of 700 or more, including many priests, nuns, and a number of Communists, could be seen applauding the lectures of Roger Garaudy of the Political Bureau of the French Communist Party and of the Rev. Anthony Dyson, Chaplain of Ripon Hall Theological College, Oxford, who both discussed the relations of Marxism and Christianity.

At the end of December, the Annual Conference of the Student Christian Movement, with almost 400 attending, took as its subject for discussion "Man Unmasked—Marx, Freud and Jesus", with Marxists amongst the lecturers, and again the Conference became something of a dialogue. In February of

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this year, the Marx Memorial Library was filled to the brim for a discussion Conference on "Marxism and Religion", with a number of Christians participating.

In March, young Christians and Communists organised a discussion Conference on "How to Change the World", which was held at Coventry, and in May a most successful dialogue on "Marxism and Christianity" was held in the course of the International Youth Festival organised at Skegness by the Young Communist League.

Early in June, under the joint auspices of a group of the Quaker Peace and International Relations Committee and *Marxism Today* a friendly ten-a-side weekend discussion was held on the subject of "Man, Society and Moral Responsibility".

Locally, in all sorts of forms—lectures, seminars and public debates—the dialogue has developed in the most varied places from Theological Colleges to Communist Party Branches. Two of these, perhaps, deserve especial mention. The first is a *public* meeting at Ilford at the end of May, chaired by the Bishop of Barking, in which Father Charles Lowe, a Catholic priest from Wapping, the Rev. Paul Oestreicher (Church of England) of the British Council of Churches, and two members of the Communist Party spoke from the platform, and at which the most moving part was the intense, critical but friendly participation from the floor, crowded out with over 200 Catholics, Protestants and Marxists. The second, which has just taken place as I write, is a large discussion meeting on Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, held in the Chaplaincy of the new Liverpool Cathedral, and addressed by local Catholics and Communists.

Already under preparation for next October (1967) and jointly sponsored by *Marxism Today* and the East-West Committee of the British Council of Churches, is a fifteen-a-side discussion on the subject of "Human Dignity"—with a first more theoretical-philosophical session on "Man and Society" and a second day, more practical, on problems of poverty and peace and Marxist-Christian co-operation.

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All these meetings have been unusually well attended. Discussion has turned around the most varied subjects, often with strong criticism from both sides, but all the meetings have been friendly, some even moving, and the opinion overwhelmingly expressed that, whatever deep differences there may be between Marxist and Christian approaches, the dialogue is fruitful, must continue, and practical co-operation can be achieved.

One of the issues that has often arisen—naturally enough at this early stage of dialogue—is what should be discussed. Should attention be in the main concentrated on burning immediate issues—like poverty, racialism, peace—on which we can hope quickly to find some common ground for common activity—or should we pay more attention to deeper theoretical, philosophical, theological questions?

In my opinion, the two types of discussion should be seen as complementary. Of course we do not want, as John Lewis rightly says, to be side-tracked to hair-splitting scholastic heights, but that is quite different from discussing theoretical approaches. The whole of the dialogue would be idle if we did not, in the course of it, seek co-operation in combating the social evils of the day. I have not attended any “dialogue” to date where it was not agreed that on such issues as poverty at home and abroad, opposition to racialism, disarmament, prevention or stopping of war, Christians and Marxists should work together. Much still needs to be done to make this a reality, but already, all over the world—for civil rights in America, against *apartheid* in South Africa, everywhere to end of war in Vietnam, Marxists and Christians, in demonstration and deputation, find themselves side by side.

But it will be, I think, easier not harder, to come together on such issues as these, if, in the course of the dialogue, we expound our more fundamental and long-term approaches, our aims, our attitudes to man and society.

One necessary and helpful aspect of the dialogue is the mutual explanation of our long-term aims, I do not like to say

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“ultimate” because Marxists envisage a never-ending process of human development.

Many Christians, I think, confuse our aim of a Communist society with this or that particular stage of socialism (with all its attendant difficulties and problems), which they have witnessed or studied in a particular socialist country. They have every right to make their criticisms of socialism as they have seen it, and such criticism can often be helpful, but they need also to see whence that country has come and in what direction it is moving.

They need, I think, and this is something that is a two-way process, to study our long-term aim of a Communist society (a society that is more advanced than and arises out of socialist society), a society without classes, without exploitation, and in which human beings can really develop to the full their diverse and many-sided talents.

Our aim is not the increase of production for its own sake, not the development of science and machinery just for itself, but at the centre of our aim and vision is man—human men and women—and we work for a world and a society where, without classes, men are no longer turned against men within or across frontiers, where one can *truly* speak of the brotherhood of man, and where men can be truly human.

Many Christians I believe will at least appreciate this aim, and many will also share it. It certainly will not be a waste of time to discuss it, and at the same time Christian aims, and certainly, it will not be a barrier to practical co-operation.

But it is not possible to discuss one's long-term aims without discussion of the stages through which one must pass on the way and the struggles necessary to make these aims a reality.

Not all Christians will condemn capitalist and imperialist society, nor accept the need for socialism and communism. But it would be wrong, unreal, not to discuss them in our dialogue.

We Marxists have often criticised Christian institutions, the Christian Establishment, if that is a fair word, for condoning

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cruel and oppressive political Establishments, for preaching obedience, resignation to the "powers that be" however ruthless.

But it seems to me, and this feeling has been strengthened in the course of the dialogue, that among Christians of all denominations there is a growing questioning of the morality of capitalism and colonialism, that what was once the attitude of a small minority of Christian radicals or socialists is becoming a much more general attitude, that there is a movement for return to the ideas of early Christianity.

Communists cannot but welcome, for instance, the approach of Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, when he writes that on the conditions of industrial society "a system has been constructed which considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right which has no limits and carries no corresponding social obligations, and which leads", he continues, "to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing 'the international imperialism of money' ". This may not be Marxism-Leninism, but, as Father Lowe said at the Ilford gathering, it is surely a language that Marxists will understand, and there is surely a basis for discussion.

And, equally, though many Christians will not accept the need for socialism, and many will have criticisms of existing socialist societies, it will surely be useful mutually to examine what sort of society can best put the vast resources of modern science at the service of men, and dispose of the built-in profit motive, competition, exploitation, and immorality of capitalism.

We must expect much probing discussion on both sides with many critical questions on the methods and the struggles necessary to change society. We as Marxists shall be asked many questions on the use and abuse of political power, on violence and non-violence, on our view of classes, on the character of revolution and revolutionary change.

And we, in our turn shall have much to ask. Professor

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MacKinnon touched on the sort of question that Marxists will want to put to many Christians. We appreciate that there are dangers of corruption with political power, that there are possibilities of revolutions "going wrong", but this is no excuse to evade the problem. If profit is the motive force of existing capitalist society, is it to be expected that those who exist on profit will easily renounce it? It is not enough to register suffering, to have pity for it, to try to alleviate it, but the point is also, surely, to eliminate it at its source.

One of the recurring and fundamental issues in the dialogue to date—and rightly so—is the nature of human nature, can it be changed, is it "perfectible"? This was a central point at the Quaker-Marxist discussion.

There seems to be a general agreement between us that nothing is more harmful, evil, reactionary, than the all-pervasive idea concealed in the five short words "You can't change human nature". But how is it to be changed? And must one begin with man or society?

It would be much too simple (though it is often done) to say that Marxists believe that to change men you have to change society and Christians that to change society you have to change man.

For the true approach in our view is much more complex (we would say dialectical). We are not (though often accused of being) economic determinists. It is true that capitalist society, in our view, narrows man, distorts him, alienates him, limits the development of his talents; and it is true that, in our view, a socialist society will free man from many of his limitations, permit a far wider use of his talents, reduce his alienation, and that a Communist society will carry the process further.

But it is men—human beings—who, in their efforts to change nature and society, change their own nature. Changing human nature is a long complex uneven *active* (not passive) process. It is true that we cannot envisage a future Communist society without a new (and better) man. But it is precisely in the process of effort now to improve human life, working to replace

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capitalist society, to build a socialist society, that men and women make themselves more human, change themselves, fit themselves for the future.

These are a few (and only a few), of the long-term, fundamental problems, that have already emerged in the course of dialogue. Each of them needs much time, much patient exchange of opinion.

We will be able, bit by bit, I hope, to pass from the *general* review of the need and possibilities of dialogue to discussion of *particular* problems and groups of problems. It was inevitable, I think, that this first discussion in *Marxism Today* should in a sense be more of a prelude to dialogue, for both sides needed to make contact, explore the ground a little, satisfy themselves that the dialogue was worth while, that common ground could be found, and to find the type of issue, long-term and immediate, that deeply concerned them both.

I think that we can now see more clearly than eighteen months ago some of the conditions for fruitful dialogue.

We should not seek in any way to hide our differences, however profound. We will work better together if we understand the areas where we cannot agree. We should not set out on a crusade to convert or deconvert one another. We should both go into the dialogue, as *ourselves*, true to ourselves and our principles, both believing that we are more correct in our essential approaches, but both willing to listen and to learn. And we should always be looking for common ground and common action. It is common ground and common action we are seeking and not a synthesis of Marxism and Christianity.

Whatever our belief or unbelief in God, whatever our belief or unbelief in a world hereafter, it is around the future of man—his well-being, his freedom to develop, his life, love, comradeship, his human development in this world—that we must look for unity.

All my predecessors on this point seem agreed. We must begin with man, rightly proclaims Alan Ecclestone. Father Corbishley stresses the need for Christians adequately to

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appreciate the relevance of their religion to human well-being. Paul Oestreicher puts it so well—"the only proper and possible subject of the dialogue is man, the double question what men need and how are they to get it".

We must fight for respect and tolerance of each other. We tried to express *our* responsibility in this respect in the statement on "Questions of Ideology and Culture" adopted by the Communist Party's Executive Committee last March (1967):

We wish to make it clear that the Communist Party will fight now under capitalism, and work in the future under socialism, for complete freedom of religious worship, for the right of all faiths to worship in their own churches with their own sacred books and for making available the resources necessary for ritual articles. We consider that both under capitalism and socialism, religious and non-religious views should freely contend. Finally we wish to make it clear that the Communist Party welcomes people of any religious faith including those who are ministers, not only working side by side with Marxists in common causes, but as members of the Communist Party, provided they accept the political programme of our party. We have never made, nor will we, acceptance of religious beliefs a bar to membership of our party.

No one should have illusions that the process of dialogue will be smooth, easy, roses all the way, that there will not be difficulties, that it will not come under attack.

But something has already been achieved and much more can be. We can, through the dialogue, get rid of the idea that Christians and Marxists (and that includes Catholics and Communists) are by definition enemies, of necessity on opposite sides in the many struggles that confront us all. Father Corbishley writes that "until a few years ago it was almost axiomatic amongst Roman Catholics that no such common ground with Marxism existed—that dialogue was, therefore, impossible". This was an approach that was often (not always) mutual. Now this is no longer so.



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In a world where the contrast between poverty and wealth is still widening, where so many millions are hungry amongst such unfathomable resources, where the miracles of science and technique that could quickly remove all men from sordid want, can, misused and abused, extinguish all humanity without any nice distinction of political or religious creed, it would be un-Marxist, un-Christian, unprincipled—call it what you will—not to pool our efforts, whatever our differences, to keep this earth a world of the living and not of the dead.

What of the future? With the dialogue in Britain still on the threshold of its potential, we must hope and work for more discussion in many places and in many forms. We must begin in our smaller and more specialised discussions to move to deeper study of the main problems. We must find definite forms of common action. And above all we must, I think, move our dialogue into the realm of public discussion.

I can understand Adrian Cunningham's feeling of uncertainty about the dialogue's future, but cannot share his doubts. All the evidence seems to be that this is not one more "wave of dialogue", one more "round-and-round" of a sad recurring discontinuous series. Much good was done by the dialogue of the 'thirties. It was not all lost as the resistance movement showed. Some of its results live today, and the dialogue seems to be, with all its weaknesses, more international, wider, deeper, and more practical, than ever it was before.

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IT takes the dialectic of face to face controversy to reveal the basic issues in the confrontation of Marxism and Christianity; hence the importance of the present interchange of views; although, as Adrian Cunningham points out, this discussion is not entirely new. It developed a long way in the 'thirties, and was resumed after the war. But has it, as Cunningham suggests, simply gone round in circles with no continuity, no development? I don't think so. Let us consider the history of this dialogue: The real beginnings in our own time go back to Frederick Denison Maurice (1842) and Canon Scott Holland, to Bishop Gore and Conral Noel. Some of the theological issues and Christological problems then discussed remain fundamental. In 1836 I edited for Gollancz in collaboration with Professor John MacMurray, Canon Charles Raven and Dr. Joseph Needham, the volume *Christianity and the Social Revolution*, which contained valuable work by W. H. Auden, Professor Pascal on religious communism in the Middle Ages and the Reformation period, Needham on the Levellers, and some straight Marxism from John Cornford and our Russian contributors. We ought not to forget the part played by Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury, who raised no serious theoretical issues but showed to thousands of Christians the practical humanism of Russian socialism, and to the Russians that not all Christians were the enemies of the people.

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The present phase of the discussion derives its special character from the following factors in the world situation:

1. The continued existence and development of Socialism over the whole of Eastern Europe and China.
2. The end of the Catholic anathema against Communism.
3. The post-Stalin changes in Communism.
4. The continued decay and disintegration of capitalist society and especially the threat of war and the fact of American intervention.
5. The political policy of coexistence and the movement in capitalist countries towards a left political unification and towards a peaceful transition to socialism.

There is far less complacency about the Affluent Society and the stability and continued progress of capitalism; but there are grave doubts among non-Marxists about the economic progress of socialism and the rights of the individual under Communism. The opposition to Marxism is on the defensive about the facts of poverty and rather desperately hoping to show that given time capitalism will abolish it, and anyway it isn't very serious. It is on the offensive about Stalinism, lack of individual freedom, the backwardness and dictatorship of Communist countries.

Whenever the dialogue gets going, if it means anything and is not a polite exchange of compliments and goodwill, these are the issues which emerge and that tend to push into the background the more fundamental principles which some of us have tried to raise and get seriously discussed.

What was earnestly hoped for, and was the real intention of the Pope's Encyclicals, was closer unity and effective action on those limited but urgent matters about which we could even now agree—peace, and social issues like housing and poverty. Little of a practical nature has yet emerged, but something has been done to show Christians that Communists are human and not as repulsively impossible as they perhaps thought. Communists have for their part found Christians who could talk sense, were completely sincere, intelligent about their

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beliefs, and capable of developing a social conscience. And there is considerable unity of feeling on Peace and on Vietnam. Perhaps the most valuable achievement here has been the breaking down at the level of the local congregation and Party branch of the outlawing of Communism. It is no longer regarded as unmentionable, outrageous, immoral, or inhuman, as Christians were frequently led to believe. There is a building of bridges here, a dispelling of illusions, an overcoming of prejudices. This will bear fruit when the political scene changes and there is that inevitable coming together of the progressive forces which we hope and work for.

Even at this level the discussion has raised some important issues and conflicting views.

*Firstly*, substantial agreement exists on what Paul Oestreicher calls "the limitless value of every human being. . . . The only proper and possible subject of the dialogue is man: the double question—What do men need and how are they to get it?"

Ecclestone questions the view now held by many Christians that "the sacred", or what the religious man would interpret as the impact of God on Man, is not essentially a purely subjective emotion, but appears as the absolute obligation to recognise the demands of human fellowship—that is, the obligation to succour the needy, to protect the helpless, to free the enslaved. It is unfortunately the case that a substantial section of the Church, and it is the section to which we must appeal, does not recognise that God meets man in the needs of his brother, in spite of the great parable of Jesus, in which the non-religious who are saved exclaim in surprise: "When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? Or naked and clothed Thee? And when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?" And Jesus replies: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me" (*Matthew 25*). Those Christians who see the very essence of Christ's teaching in *this* relationship with men, and its sacred obligation it involves, who see in *this* experience how and when

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God confronts the soul with his presence, are those who can find a wide agreement with those who share the faith of Marx when he proclaimed:

the doctrine that man is the highest being for man—the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, despised and rejected being.  
(*Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*)

It is important to make this absolutely basic, not only because of its centrality to the Christian gospel, but because it is one of the gravest and most obstructive misunderstandings of Marxism to believe that it fails to value the individual and even subordinates him to some super-individual entity—the State. Christian and Marxist can wholeheartedly endorse Marx's own declaration here when he says:

Above all one must avoid setting up society as an abstraction opposed to the individual. The individual *is* the social entity. His life is therefore an expression and verification of social life.

(*Paris Manuscripts of 1844*)

This whole conception of "the sacred" as the quality of right social relationships has been very firmly established in Christian theology and in philosophy by Professor Oman, Professor Farmer and John MacMurray. As MacMurray says: "Religion is about the community of persons". This must be strongly stressed in the dialogue since it is the foundation on which a very real unity can be built.

*Secondly*, we cannot agree with Canon Fox's neo-Platonic elevation of the spiritual sphere to the plane of ultimate reality, so that "life does not matter very much". Canon Fox describes himself as "orthodox", but I don't think he is. The traditional Jewish and Christian doctrine involves the redemption and transformation of *this* world. The New Jerusalem is not "up there" in the realm of the purely spiritual, the timeless, the immaterial. The Evangelist sees it "coming down out of heaven

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from God—and the streets of the City were pure gold—and there was no temple therein” (*Revelation XXI*). We are to build Jerusalem “in England’s green and pleasant land”, so that the common tasks and the whole material world become the manifestation of the Divine, and the secular is sacralised. We unhesitatingly reject the other-worldliness of the well-known broadcaster who declared that “Somehow or other, by hook or by crook, this world must be robbed of the importance which it has had in men’s minds for the last hundred years. There is another world or order of life which is more important still.” (Rev. D. R. Davies.) As MacMurray well says, “The Hebrew form of thought rebels against the very idea of a distinction between the secular and the religious”; and it should be added that the same is true of Christian thought, as Alan Ecclestone finely and clearly demonstrates.

But unless we can immediately proceed to say that in our present capitalist world man is not regarded as of “limitless value”, but is indeed alienated, deprived and frustrated; unless we can see that it is the very nature of capitalism to treat men as expendable units of production, so that our task is to change the very structure of society, then our magnificent declaration of faith becomes “as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals”.

As Ecclestone says, “what in practice are we to commit ourselves to in this proclamation? What exactly do we set about doing?” The Marxist is clear about this. Goodwill by itself is not enough. Nor is its increase, even to the limit, enough. It is possible to care, to love, and yet not to *know* how to make that care effective. *Knowledge* becomes an essential element in real love, and to forget that is not to love, as a foolish mother, full of concern for her child, might not bother about immunisation or keeping the germs out of the milk. Our Quaker friends found an almost insuperable difficulty here in realising that it is simply not possible to treat man as a brother, to liberate him from want and exploitation, just by being kinder and kinder, more and more benevolent within the structure of an acquisi-

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tive society whose whole mechanism is that of subordinating men—all of us, capitalist as well as worker—to the exigencies of the market, to the inexorable requirements of the financial system. The failure to realise this could be illustrated by imagining some persons of extreme benevolence endeavouring to cope with a typhoid epidemic but refusing to listen to the information about the sewage contamination of the water supply. Benevolent people are sometimes reluctant to use their brains and listen to scientific advice. It seems a bit materialistic, a derogation of the spiritual impulse. Surely love is enough. But it isn't!

In the days of slavery in the Southern States of America, the kind slave-owner thought that all would be well if everybody would be really kind to their slaves. But the only Christian thing was to *end* the master-chattel relationship altogether, for within that relationship a *real* equality, real recognition of the sacredness of personality cannot obtain.

There is no possibility of realising this as far as the structural intractability of modern capitalism is concerned without understanding the economic mechanism. This should not be beyond us. We need no more intellectual capacity for it than for grasping the germ theory of disease, or the importance of vitamins, or the safe use of electrical gadgets and lighting wires in the house.

The inevitability of our involvement in an impersonal mechanism destructive of human values, in so far as we allow ourselves to accept the operations of capitalism, is frankly admitted by leading capitalist economists and sociologists like Professor Hayek. Warning us that socialism spells serfdom and that we must be economically free to follow the demands of self-interest in industry or business for human welfare depends on it, he goes on to admit that the capitalist system will only work if we accept the operation of its laws in spite of their "irrationality", "unintelligibility" and "immorality". As he says, "the craving for intelligibility produces illusory demands which no (capitalist) system can satisfy", and we must learn

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to "bow before moral rules whose utility is not rationally demonstrable". (*Individualism: True and False.*)

Another highly respected economist, who is also Lecturer in Christian Ethics at Union Ideological Seminary, USA, has laid great stress on this. "We cannot," he says, "over-emphasise the structural nature of the impasse, which demands a structural remedy, a structural reconstruction. The problem is not one of piecemeal difficulties to be handled piecemeal, but of a rigid structure geared the wrong way." (Eduard Heimann, *Reason and Faith in Modern Society.*)

This, of course, is what accounts for the paradox of poverty in plenty, for the inability of capitalism to utilise to the full its economic resources and wipe out poverty, for the perpetuation of a scarcity economy utterly inappropriate to our economic potentialities; for the existence of unemployment though human needs are unsatisfied and economic resources not fully utilised. The realisation of this lifts the problem beyond rhetoric and exhortation. The ethical obligation, and the religious obligation too, become the requirement to *understand* the essential *conditions* under which alone the Christian ethic can be put into practice. I am afraid the dialogue, to prove at all effective, will have, at some point, to turn into a seminar and get down to some hard thinking on questions such as these if it is not to end in hot air. It is the economic structure that men of goodwill must take the trouble to understand.

Marx sums this up very clearly:

The social forms of capitalism have become antagonistic to a true society and to the self-achievement of the individual. Only a society in which the means of production are communally and not privately owned provides the basis for genuinely co-operative human relations; only in such a community will man find in his relations with others the realisation of his true self.

(*Paris Manuscripts, 1844*)

This brings us to what appears to be the second serious



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obstacle to the fruitful development of the dialogue and to real progress in working together towards a socialist society, towards co-operative human relations. Oestreicher is not the only one who has come up against it. Cunningham is aware of it, too, and it came to the front at the Quaker-Marxist Weekend Conference. What happens to the dialogue when, to take an actual case Oestreicher brings up, a young Western Christian who has recently visited one of the East European socialist countries "throws in the speaker's face a whole catalogue of abuses he has discovered, not vague abuses, but concrete examples of injustice being suffered by many people known to him personally"? . . . How can all this be squared with the speaker's conscience and humanistic ideals? And what about "revisionist comrades rotting away in some jail"?

What this intervention comes to is this: "You speak of alienated, oppressed and humiliated man; you say this is the inevitable result of capitalism; you say that socialism establishes a new system of relationships in which man becomes free, is properly valued, develops at last all his potentialities. But Socialism has been established in Russia for fifty years, in Eastern Europe for twenty-five years, but here man is still alienated, oppressed, imprisoned for political and ideological deviations; he is still poor, still only a factory hand subject to the tyranny of the machine and a privileged ruling class. How come?"

Both Christians and Marxists have something to learn from the issue thus so sharply raised. But is it the right procedure to sidetrack the whole dialogue into an endless and inconclusive argument as to the comparative standards of life in capitalist or socialist countries; to discuss interminably factory management in Yugoslavia, political corruption in Czechoslovakia, the unavailability of the *Daily Mail* in Moscow street kiosks, the present extent of imprisonments for political and ideological deviations in Russia, the standard of life in Bulgaria in 1967 compared with 1937, and so forth? In the first place people are often too thoroughly brainwashed to take a balanced view.

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Secondly, the statistical data require vast knowledge and balanced judgment. Thirdly, people cannot easily be brought to understand the depth of poverty in pre-war Eastern Europe, or the concealed suppression of ideological and political freedom under monopoly capitalism. Fourthly, they won't believe even the best substantiated facts about the actual progress in socialist countries, or the real freedom which exists there.

If this question is to be *settled* on the basis of factual evidence before we move on, the dialogue comes to a stop; and whoever raised the issue, for whatever motive, has effectively by-passed the whole Marxist criticism of capitalist society, and its proposals for a new social order. The Marxist case stands adjourned until the verdict of guilty or not guilty is passed on Eastern European socialism. Very successfully the whole criticism of the inhumanity of capitalism as a money-controlled and personality destructive mechanism, is turned. The cynical defeatist conclusion of the dialogue becomes: "It isn't capitalism that is at fault, but human nature. The failure of socialism is as complete as that of Western Europe. Let's forget all this Utopianism; get rid of romantic illusions and get on with piecemeal reforms and the patient reduction of the few pockets of poverty that still remain in our affluent society. All societies have their imperfections, but liberal reformism, Wilson's pragmatic socialism, Christian concern for suffering, if persisted in and extended, are the best that can be done."

This is not such a cogent argument as it appears. It is a skilful debating point, but not quite honest. In logic we call it the fallacy of *tu quoque*—"You're another". It successfully evades the question of *principle*. If capitalism is destructive of personality, if its social relations are exploitive and less than human, whether socialism has succumbed to the same evils or not, *that is so*. And if it is so then on Christian and on ethical grounds capitalism stands condemned and a new pattern of human relations must be found. Capitalism is not exonerated if some other society is believed to be also at fault! The argu-

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ment must be brought back to this, or it is sheer dishonest evasion of the moral issue.

But the Christian ethic is not overthrown because so many Christians have betrayed the Christian ideal. The wars of religion, the Spanish Inquisition, the Albigensian Massacres, St. Bartholomew's Eve, the iniquities of the Renaissance Popes, throw no slur on the Sermon on the Mount, any more than the betrayal of Judas Iscariot reflects on the integrity of Christ. Chesterton once said, "We are told that Christianity has failed. It has not failed. It has been found difficult, and not tried at all."

We do not criticise the Christian ideal of the full acceptance of the sacredness of human personality because Christians have failed to realise it; we do criticise those Christians who fail to realise that the economic laws of capitalism do not allow that ideal to be put into practice, any more than the existence of a slave system in the past did. We assert that the *social* ownership of the means of production and its organisation for the sole purpose of satisfying human need *does* provide a social pattern in which for the first time it becomes *possible*, though not without difficulty and certainly requiring a long period of re-education, to establish right human relations, to realise the Christian ethical ideal.

But to reconstruct the social pattern does not *automatically* transform human conduct, any more than the abolition of slavery did. Nor does the end of economic exploitation immediately dissolve those religious yearnings and compensations which the inhumanity of capitalism inevitably gives rise to.

Jack Dunman reproaches me with "postulating the total disappearance of religion as soon as we have a satisfactory economic system because since alienation automatically disappears, the consolations of religion are unnecessary". Of course, what I actually said was exactly the opposite. I said, "nor does this mean that the day after the red flag is sent up over Parliament buildings, the Church falls in ruins. A classless society is not built in a day. As long as sacrifices are demanded

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to carry through modernisation, as long as threats of intervention drain away resources and make an abnormal degree of discipline and precautions against subversion necessary, so long will Marx's conditions for the disappearance of religion remain unfulfilled."

Marx himself was explicit on this issue. He said, "Only through years of struggle can the class which overthrows cleanse itself of the mire of the old society and become fit to create a new society." But man learns a new way of life and changes himself *not* by spiritual exercises in anticipation of socialism, but firstly in the organised, dedicated struggle for socialism, and then *in the process of learning how to build socialism*. He learns by the process of re-making society. "You must pass through fifteen, twenty, perhaps fifty years of civil war not merely to change the system, but also to change yourselves," he said. And Lenin made the same point. "The human material with which we seek to build socialism has been corrupted by thousands of years of slavery, serfdom, capitalism and the war of every man against his neighbour."

Of course, this criticism of Marxist socialism by our Christian friends is also a valuable corrective of Marxist Utopianism, of rosy-coloured descriptions of the first, most difficult stage of building socialism. We ourselves have sometimes ignored the difficulties and shortcomings of the transition to socialism. Terribly hampered by intervention, blockade, attempts at subversion from the capitalist world, the Cold War, the military threat of invasion, socialism has pursued a difficult and uphill road. Let us be ruthlessly honest about all this, and then we can assess the enormous strides which *have* been made; we can attempt to show that within a structure which *releases* the forces of production, men are learning rapidly to make a new and better world; and they have already in their hands the earnest of still finer things to come. For whatever the shortcomings, and they are many, they have got the essentials right. I often find religious people seriously vexed at the appearance in the Constitution of a Socialist State of the Christian precept:

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“He that will not work neither shall he eat” (*St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, Ch. III*). They deny, in fact, its moral validity. To the socialist it is the essential basis of a non-exploitive economy and therefore of a really human society. Much follows. There are a thousand evidences of the absence of mere money values, of the commercialisation of art and literature and manufacture and shopkeeping; evidences of different priorities, of a saner, cleaner, more normal and simple life for men. Not to recognise it indeed is evidence of a blindness that has the signs of judgment—“If the light within thee be darkness, how great is that darkness”.

There remain certain fundamental moral issues beyond the question of behaving consistently within one’s principles. Now some of these are generally valid for both socialists and Christians, they are universal moral rules; but others are specifically Marxist, such as the principle that all able-bodied persons shall work and shall not eat unless they do—and the corollary: that no one shall live simply by appropriating the fruits of another’s labour, that it is a crime to enjoy the fruits of another’s toil by requiring him to labour for you. No sin a man may commit, no disgrace he may bring upon himself, is as reprehensible as exploitation or getting money by buying cheap and selling dear. A man may sell his brains or any other product of his own creative activity, but he is not to speculate and make profit on the labour of anyone else. The ideal is the dignity of labour instead of the dignity of possession: not those who *gain*, but those who *give* receive honour.

The second basic moral principle is that of equality—not, of course, the ridiculous claim that men are equally clever, but equality of opportunity, especially in education, equal possibility of finding work suited to one’s ability, equality in relating privilege to deserts and not to birth or ownership. This is not to imply equal remuneration, an equal standard of living, an entire absence of privilege. All this Marx repudiated in *The Gotha Programme* as any part of the *first* stage of the new order,

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which he called socialism. Marxism affirms the principle for this period of a wage determined not by needs but by the value of the work done. "Right can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by it." *To everyone according to his needs* is the more distant goal. Marxism was never any form of Utopianism but demands what is *now*, under existing conditions, both possible and necessary. In our day that is the basic change in the pattern of social relationships and the acceptance of the essential principles we have mentioned—it is *not* some ultimate ideal quite beyond present realisation.

This raises at once a further question: What is for the Marxist the origin, guarantee and sanction of the moral law? One contributor to this symposium suggested that the only Marxist alternative to *the religious motive for morality* is "enlightened self-interest". Marxism has never said so. Nor do we need to justify theoretically the principle of working for that *common good* in which all share. It is more profitable to see how these common values are to be attained than to spend one's energy in justifying them.

But this is simply not a Marxist problem. Students of ethics do not today rest the validity of ethics on a transcendental origin and sanction. Men do not need to derive their moral principles from anything other than the common interests of humanity, as men themselves discover what these are.

I know of no inquiry into the basis of the moral law by any sort of philosopher which sees the necessity of making the test of its validity its Divine origin. Many laymen and many religious people may think so; but they have not to argue this out with Marxists, but with the theologians and the ethical philosophers who reject the necessity for a religious justification for the moral law.

But how do we overcome "the inherent selfishness of man"? asks Dr. Runcorn. Can we do so without supernatural grace? Is not man inherently selfish? This is a myth, too. Put man in a society in which he can only survive by downing the other

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man and he will be competitive, aggressive and selfish. Put him in a co-operative society seeking the general good, and he won't become a saint automatically, but he now becomes susceptible of moral education. This is a task for teachers, psychologists, writers and journalists, for all those who create the cultural and ideological environment which helps to mould men. Man is not *anything* inherently. Man, as Marx said, makes himself; and eventually remakes himself by remaking society. But he doesn't have to be turned into an angel in order to remake society. He remakes society when it becomes imperatively necessary, when it is that or disaster. When he does so, this in due course turns him into a better man, a man who is a bit nearer being a real man.

*Are moral principles absolute?* Certainly not. But here again Marxists do not hold views in any way different from the ethical philosophers. There are principles of special and very general importance, like the sanctity of life, but even they are not absolute. There are other principles that are obligations arising from our knowledge of the rules of health, from various forms of social organisation, from the ordinary obligations of family and corporate life. These are constantly subject to adjustment on the basis of what is best for everybody in the long run.

What is right is judged by estimating the consequences. This is a responsibility not to be dodged by running to a priest, or to the Bible or anywhere else for an *absolute* rule, true regardless of the consequences. To follow such a rule would be highly immoral. But absolutism does come in, and is dialectically related (as Lenin showed) to this very relativism, *for it is because morality is always and in all places relative to circumstances that it is binding at any time and in any place.*

*Means and Ends.* Marxists are often condemned as immoral people who will choose any means, however horrible, to achieve their ends. In fact, no ethical person and no Christian keeps to means that are *themselves* absolutely good regardless of the consequences of doing so. The ends we follow necessarily

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determine the means which achieve them. And they are to be judged by their consequences. There is no other way to judge the morality of any course of action. If good is done at a cost of greater evil than that good, we have made a moral blunder. We must achieve the good at the least cost, of course; and every necessary departure from the course which ordinary moral rules would indicate if other values were not imperative, lessens the good obtained and is to be regretted and deplored. Everyone really believes this who goes to the dentist to have a tooth out. It is not specially a Marxist problem. It is a general ethical problem, and Christians judge the means by the end as much as anybody—and quite right, too!

*The use of violence.* This is an allied question. Oestreicher says that "Christians would need to deny that struggle need be (or perhaps even would be) violent". Really! Is Christianity as such committed to absolute pacifism? Since when? If he means that Christians cannot support violence being adopted in preference to constitutional means if such means are available, who suggests that it should? All Western Communist Parties are working for a peaceful, constitutional transition to socialism. But if we had to defend the constitution against a reactionary attempt to overthrow it by force, as was recently done in Greece, we would have a complete moral right to defend our constitutional liberty by force, and no Christian theologian or ecclesiastical body I have ever heard of has ever denied that right.

Our Christian friends should make themselves conversant with the clearly stated and widely publicised programmes of the various Communist Parties as part of their contribution to the dialogue.

There remain a number of fundamental questions of basic Marxist and Christian philosophy. It would seldom be profitable to discuss these fully in popular gatherings. After all, the earlier issues are the most fundamental, for if agreement can be reached in the broad social issues of our time, local, national



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and international, we do not wish to delay the achievement of unity because theoretical differences remain. As I said, "It is not because philosophy is unimportant, but because when the house is blazing I do not want to drag the fireman away from his hose to discuss the Laws of Thermo-dynamics", or the nature of the Trinity or the essential doctrines of Dialectical Materialism.

Anyway, no one has to subscribe to Marxism to be a member of the Communist Party. You can believe in any philosophy you like and accept the creed of any religion you like. Christ made no theological demands on those he called to eternal life. His only criterion of salvation was that they had succoured the needy. And according to the parable they were vastly surprised, because they had no orthodox beliefs at all.

For this reason philosophical discussion is not a priority in the dialogue. But it is of great importance, and I am deeply and continuously involved in it and most anxious to develop it—but not at the expense of suspending unity on the immediate issues, postponing the task of getting clear as to the structural and ethical obstacles to the realisation of our common ethical aims. I would sooner convince a Christian of the necessity of the social ownership of the means of production for the fulfilment of our common hopes for man's betterment, than convince him of the errors of idealism. That can come later.

There are, however, a number of important issues, some of which have been raised by Fr. Corbishley and Adrian Cunningham, which should be considered in the right place and at the right time.

- a. The sociology and the cultural and ideological history of religions.
- b. The question of ideology and the relativity of knowledge to class.
- c. The dialectical process, what is it—does it go on indefinitely?
- d. Is the final meaning of man's existence found within temporal history?

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- e. Do Marxists think they are being irresistibly swept along on the tide of history (the relation of Hegelianism to Marxism)?
- f. The question of *Materialism* and *Atheism*.

The only two which immediately concern the dialogue are the last two. And while I speak here only for myself, I feel that greater clarity on these issues would further the extent of our unity with Christians, and remove certain grave barriers.

*Materialism*: Materialism has one meaning for all non-Marxists, and another, special, and quite different meaning for orthodox Marxists. The meaning in philosophical terms is the reduction of all reality to the lowest physical terms—to atoms, molecules, electrons in motion. Life, mind, the spiritual manifestations of life are thus reduced to epiphenomena, mere appearances, basically illusory, unreal, of no account. Marxists are not materialists in this sense at all, and Marx explicitly repudiated this *mechanistic* form of materialism. But by calling themselves dialectical *materialists*, Marxists may mean something for themselves, but they afford no enlightenment to others. What they really mean is that they neither seek for a moment of creation at which at the word of the Lord, the Universe sprang into being, nor do they believe in the injection of spirit with the evolutionary process to bring forth life and mind; nor do they reckon with supernatural forces in chemistry or physics or medicine (I do not refer, of course, to psychosomatic medicine), or, of course, in history or social development. Psychologists do not believe in a mental *stuff* interacting with the brain—the myth of “the ghost in the machine”, and so on. Nobody believes all this today. But people who take the modern view don’t call themselves materialists. They don’t call themselves anything. All modern men put man and his experience squarely within the Nature that used to be set over against him as a spiritual being. The gulf between nature and human life disappeared with the theory of evolution. The old dualism of mind and body is *out*. Some people talk vaguely of the “ground of our being”, of something beneath or beyond, somehow

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responsible for it all, but it is not a belief that in my view makes any real difference, that has consequences, or that diminishes the rights of experimental science. So why talk about materialism when everybody else gives it its dictionary meaning, and if you call yourself "a materialist" thinks you are professing a totally outworn and discarded piece of nineteenth-century rationalism? Marx never called himself a materialist, not even a dialectical materialist. He simply based history on the activities of real individuals "and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find and those which they produced by their activity. . . . The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production". (*The German Ideology*.) Therefore it is men's "social existence that determines their consciousness". As they live they think.

Most sociologists, economists and anthropologists, most archaeologists and historians believe that today. But this is not materialism in the accepted sense of the word. It does not reduce man's consciousness to molecular motion any more than the *dependence* of violin music on the strings, the bow, and fiddle, reduces the actual music to "nothing but" the material basis.

We should give up using words in a totally different way from everyone else. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make the words mean different things." Precisely!

*Atheism:* For Marxists to call themselves atheists is entirely un-Marxist. Marx always refused to use the term. Firstly, because it seemed to him childish—like shaking your fist at the sky and shouting, "I don't believe in the Big Bogey Man up there!"<sup>1</sup> Secondly, because Marx's theory of religion was that God was the projection of the manhood of which man was deprived in his exploited condition. To deny its existence was

<sup>1</sup> Marx's letter to the Young Hegelians in Berlin (1842).

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to deny man's essence. But when the essence is *realised*, it won't be projected on the transcendental; and it won't be necessary to deny it.<sup>1</sup> He insisted, therefore, on *not* engaging in religious or theological controversy, *not* attacking religion. You turn religious questions into social questions and attack the dehumanising conditions under which man suffers.<sup>2</sup>

This is by no means a final or exhaustive explanation of religion; and we should not treat Marx's works like Holy Writ and refuse to follow the immensely interesting anthropological and psychological investigations into the origins and social functions of religion which have gone on since his time. Modern thinkers who consider man's evolution and development scientifically don't find it necessary to argue against belief in God. What do you call a man who doesn't believe in the devil? The supernatural has been progressively extruded from nature, from the life of man in the world of medicine and technology, and from history. Modern theology and philosophy if they deal with such subjects have got beyond demanding the acceptance of a Divine intervention in secular matters. Even for them the "ultimate ground of existence" is not a personal god operating within the universe or from outside it. This naive philosophising is out of date. Marxists have no need to engage in old-fashioned polemics about miracles and a god "up there", especially since the work of the Bishop of Woolwich; nor is there any need to enter the field of speculative metaphysics and debate the grounds for the "ultimate ground" of our being. We would do better to follow the Italian communist leader Togliatti in this matter who tells us emphatically that "the old atheist propaganda is of no use"; and that our attitude to contemporary religion and philosophy should be to turn our attention to "those new and positive aspects coming to light through the development of thought corresponding to new human and social realities".

<sup>1</sup> Marx on *Communism as Socialism coinciding with Humaneness* (1844).

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *The Jewish Question*.

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We have no quarrel with those who find help and comfort in what William James called these "over-beliefs" so long as they do not obscure important social and economic issues. The believer is convinced that they help him and would help us all. We may disagree, but this is not a difference of opinion that should keep us apart on any fundamental social issue.

Marxists have got a lot to learn *and unlearn*; so have Christians. It is hard to get all these things straight—but it is a great deal harder to unknow them after you once get them crooked.

One of the first things we need beyond the entirely acceptable and convincing political programme of Communism, is a new look at Marxism—in the light of Marx himself. What is called "Vulgar Marxism", a popularised and over-simplified version, mainly derived from handbooks and summaries and popular expositions of Marxism, is now a serious obstacle to the drawing together of progressive people of all creeds and parties. When, however, we re-cast our Marxism in current terms, the cry "revisionist" goes up. When we point out that vulgar Marxism can't be supported by what Marx actually wrote, the cry "dogmatist" goes up. But the work must go on!

Christians have got a lot to learn and unlearn, too. But that they will best do for themselves without any helpful advice from Marxists. And they *are* doing it, too. There are no finer words of counsel and exhortation for the Church in these grave days than those of Charles Gore, the Bishop of Oxford:

"Where has been the fire of prophetic indignation in the Church; which yet exists to represent Christ? How utterly on the whole has the official Church failed to exhibit the prophetic spirit! This is the first claim that we make upon the Church today—that it should make a tremendous act of penitence for having failed so long and on so wide a scale to behave as the champion of the oppressed and the weak; for having tolerated what it ought not to have tolerated; for having so often been on the wrong side. And the penitence must lead to reparation while there is yet time, ere the well-merited judgments of God take all weapons of social influence out of our hands."

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Marxists, too, have frankly to admit the injustices, cruelties and barbarities of the Stalinist era, as indeed they have done—and officially. As a corporate body the Russian Communist Party has freely confessed this and has proceeded to take the necessary measures to ensure that these things shall never recur. That they still retain habits of interference with literary freedom is plain enough; but there are now forces openly working in Russia in the opposite direction and the strong stream of public opinion is with them increasingly. We can find abundant grounds for hope that in the new socialist world they are creating “a community in which man will find in his relations with others the realisation of his true self”. It is for us to take the measures which society has for the first time made both necessary and possible to rebuild the foundations of our own society so that we, too, may “overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned and despised being”<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Marx, *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.

THIS DIALOGUE of Christianity and Marxism was originally published in the pages of the British Communist Party's monthly journal *Marxism Today*. It is here presented without alteration in book form.

In many lands today the Dialogue is being conducted, with fruitful results. The interchange of ideas between the world's two most powerful and influential ideologies is indeed of absorbing interest, when leading Churchmen and Communists are prepared to discuss common views and ideals, and to compare approaches to the most pressing moral and political issues of our time, without the Church hurling anathemas at the Communists or the Communists accusing Christians of peddling "the opium of the people".

This book is published in the hope that it will prove but the first instalment in Britain of a continuous Dialogue.

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