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The meaning of man in the debate between Christianity and Marxism

Andrew Kirk

We reprint here (in a slightly revised form) the first part of an article which first appeared in the Latin American Theological Fraternity Bulletin *in 1974. This first part sets out the nature of the Christian-Marxist debate, and analyses the concept of man in Marxism. The second part, which we hope to print in the next issue of* Themelios, *will present a Christian critique of Marxist anthropology, and suggest a way forward for the Christian church in its confrontation with Marxist thought. Professor Kirk has been engaged in theological education in Argentina since 1967, and is editor of the* Theological Fraternity Bulletin. *He has recently completed a doctoral thesis on the theology of liberation.*

In a certain sense the debate began just as soon as Karl Marx had assimilated Feuerbach's criticism of religion.[1] Marx poured out his own most celebrated criticisms in the manuscript *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction* (1844), for example:

> 'The criticism of heaven is thus transformed into the criticism of earth,
> the criticism of religion into the criticism of law,
> and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.'[2]

These words summarize well his attitude towards all religions as reflections of man's basic alienation, which in fact is political. In the same work he continues his thought on religious alienation:

> 'man as the world of man, the state, society.
> This state, this society, produces religion's inverted attitude to the world,
> because they are an inverted world themselves.
> Thus the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.'[3]

In another of his writings, *The Jewish Question* (1843-44), he affirms that

> 'the existence of religion is the existence of a defect . . .
> History has for long enough been resolved into superstition:
> we now resolve superstition into history.'[4]

After the so-called 1844 manuscripts, Marx hardly returned to the subject of religion. Apparently he did not show any particular personal disquiet about religious matters.[5] On the other hand, his closest collaborator, Friedrich Engels, continued to be attracted by the subject of religion, and by Christianity in particular.[6]

The modern debate, often referred to as 'the Christian-Marxist dialogue', began to take shape once N. Kruschev, in 1955, had buried the 'personalistic' era of Stalin and encouraged a new openness among Communist parties, particularly in the West. It gathered momentum after John XXIII became head of the Roman Catholic Church (1959). In the last fifteen years or so various meetings between Marxist theorists and Christian theologians have taken place;[7] on the Christian side both Protestants and Catholics have participated.

[1] L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*. For the influence of Feuerbach on Marx, consult D. McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London, 1969).

[2] K. Marx, *The Early Texts*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford, 1971), p. 115.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[5] *Cf.*, Ignace Lepp, *Psicoanálisis del ateismo moderno* (Buenos Aires, 1963) p. 66.

[6] *Cf.*, especially *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and *Anti-Duhring*.

[7] For example, the conference in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia (1966), organized by the Society of St Paul. *Cf.* also the results of a series of meetings which were held in 1964 between French theologians and Marxist theorists in *El Hombre Cristiano y el Hombre Marxista* (Barcelona, 1967).

1. The content of the dialogue and the presuppositions which make it possible

In so far as Marxism is, for its followers, a humanism which seeks to elevate man to the maximum point of his self-realization, so that, in order to reach this goal, it is necessary to eliminate every barrier which obstructs it (including religion), the most important question for the Marxists within this debate is the following: is it true that religion, *per se*, constitutes a necessary brake to human progress? On a lower level, Marxists would also place on the agenda the following subjects for debate: work and its significance, the condemnation of capitalism, the suppression of the class system and the construction of socialism.

For many Christians the central problem which needs to be solved is the relationship between the individual and the historical process. It is a problem which has become particularly serious in the later development of Marxism, due to the fact that once Marxism has achieved power in the state it has pursued a policy of 'integralism' which has elevated the institution over the people and authority over initiative.[8]

Both sides recognize that the problem of man must occupy a central place in the debate. Garaudy, for example, asserts emphatically that it is impossible to put the concept of man in parentheses, limiting the debate to the purely political. As he rightly stresses, neither Marxism nor Christianity separates socio-political problems from philosophical principles.[9]

Various Christian writers have stated that the essential element in the debate about man concerns his future.[10] In this sense the concerns of the Marxist H. Marcuse about man's future expectations in an increasingly mechanized society which seems to propel him onwards to an ever-increasing dehumanization should also be highlighted.[11]

Within a general concern about man, one of the most critical questions, which will constitute a special subject for study in this essay, concerns the relationship between theory and *praxis*, in the context of man's being and activities.[12]

Evidently, if a dialogue of this nature, which represents the breaking down of a century-old mutual hostility, is going to have any chance of success, both sides are going to have to agree on certain common criteria prior to the initiation of the discussions. Leslie Dewart, in his introduction to the book by Garaudy, states that dialogue requires that each side be open to the possibility that the truth of the other can develop. He distinguishes between a body of beliefs which is confessed as being totally certain and a body of beliefs which is confessed as the totality of an immutable truth. Only in the first case can there be any hope of intellectual interchange, even when the beliefs are contradictory.[13]

On the level of attitudes, it is important that both sides are open to the possibility of achieving a new kind of society, even a new man, which can arise only as a consequence both of the negation of present western civilization and of fundamental changes in present experiments in socialism.[14] Gozzini asks Marxists to recognize that they belong to a heritage which has erred both in theory and practice on many occasions[15] (a concept which he could equally have applied to his own Catholic confession[16]).

Following the idea that a qualitatively new kind of search, undertaken together, is the only way of discovering new options for man because of the theoretical and practical failures of the actual capitalist and socialist systems, B. Zylstra comments, 'We must rediscover a concept of the value, structure and purpose of human life which is neither Capitalist nor Marxist.'[17]

The 'success' of the dialogue depends, to a large extent, on the possibility of its taking place at the

[8] G. Girardi, *Marxism and Christianity* (Dublin, 1968), pp. 173-181. A. Schaff recognizes this fundamental problem when he says that 'Marxism must give positive answers to the problems of individual man' (*Filosofía del Hombre: Marx o Sartre?* (Mexico, 1965).

[9] *From Anathema to Dialogue* (New York, 1966), p. 37. Even within Marxism, the nature of the humanism which is being looked for is still the object of study and polemic, *cf.* Althusser, 'Dos humanismos socialistas' in *La Revolución Teórica de Marx* (Buenos Aires, 1971), *passim*.

[10] For example, Ogletree in *Apertura para el Diálogo* (Buenos Aires, 1971), p. 13, and J. Moltmann, 'La Revolución de la Libertad', *ibid.*, p. 50.

[11] Above all his book *One-dimensional Man;* also his essay 'Socialist Humanism', in E. Fromm *et al., Socialist Humanism* (London, 1967).

[12] *Cf.* Girardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 181ff., 198; and the famous work of Mao Tse-Tung, 'On Practice' in *Essential Works of Marxism* (New York, 1961), pp. 499ff.

[13] L. Kolakowski says with regard to the immutability of Marxist ideology, 'The purity of Marxist doctrine is useful only if Marxism considers itself to be a religious phenomenon instead of being a science' ('Permanent vs. Transitory Aspects of Marxism' in *Towards a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the New Left Today*, New York, 1968, p. 184).

[14] Garaudy, *op. cit.*, pp. 63, 64; H. Cox, 'A New Phase in the Marxist-Christian Encounter' (*Christianity and Crisis*, XXV, 18, 1965), p. 229; Rosales in G. Gozzini *et al., El Diálogo de la Epoca: Católicos y Marxistas* (Buenos Aires, 1965), p. 12.

[15] Gozzini, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[16] *Cf.* H. Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry* (London, 1971), *passim;* Girardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 175, 176. Lepp (*op. cit.*, p. 78) points out that in practice the claim to possess an absolute truth, absolutely defined, has always led to reactionism and conservatism.

[17] 'Karl Marx: Radical Humanist' (*Vanguard*, December 1973).

level of individuals rather than institutions, and within the western tradition of 'protest'.[18] As Girardi well says, 'Marxism (Christianity) which is open to dialogue is the Marxism (Christianity) of men, closed to dialogue is that of institutions.'[19]

According to Moltmann, both sides are struggling with new problems which the traditional doctrines of each one do not really solve.[20] This study hopes to contribute to this struggle, taking as its starting-point man who is once again at the crossroads of his existence and destiny.[21]

2. Which Marxism?

Before arriving at the main part of the discussion, it is necessary to enquire about the essence, synthesis or central teaching of Marxism.

Such a task is somewhat complicated by the fact that there are three principal currents within Marxism and each one varies partially from the others in its view of man. There is the Marxism of Marx himself;[22] the Marxism of Lenin, known as 'Marxism-Leninism';[23] and the Marxism of the 'revisionists' or the 'new left'.[24]

A really thorough discussion of Marxism would require us to analyse both the internal links and the causes which have produced the theoretical development between the different stages. In each tendency, however, there do exist certain constants which allow us to classify Marxism in a particular way as a unique philosophy and theory concerning revolution.

[18] Gozzini, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 36.
[19] *Op. cit.*, p. 204.
[20] *Op. cit.*, p. 49.
[21] 'Marx began from the philosophy of man in order to be able later to reach scientific socialism' (A. Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 14). 'Christian apologetic does not start out from some place beyond the stars. It starts out from man and what man can know about himself' (F. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, London, 1968, p. 123).
[22] Marx was a prolific writer. His concept of man is not systematically spelt out in any one of his writings. Rather it has to be deduced from a comparison of various works which ostensibly treat different subjects at different periods of his life. In the course of our discussion we will quote from the majority of his relevant works.
[23] Lenin's principal works are: *The State and Revolution* (1917); *What Should Be Done?* (1902); *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder* (1920); *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918); *Imperialism the Final Stage of Capitalism* (1917).
[24] The main works of the new left which we have consulted in this study are those of Kolakowski and Schaff (already quoted); M. Djilas, *The New Class* (New York, 1951); the symposium edited by E. Fromm, *Socialist Humanism;* R. Garaudy (already quoted) and the contributions by Marxists to the various symposia quoted throughout these footnotes. Mao Tse-Tung and Fidel Castro claim to be orthodox Marxist-Leninists. They, however, have developed this orthodoxy according to the particular circumstances of their respective revolutions. Thus they represent a different evolution of Leninism from that of either Russian or west European Communism.

Marxism represents the most consistent humanism developed this side of the Enlightenment and the French revolution. As such it demonstrates a determined optimism in man's unlimited possibilities of self-realization.[25] Marxist humanism should be radically distinguished from other socialist humanisms,[26] particularly in its criticism of idealism and in its appeal to an objective, scientific analysis of society. According to Marxism, the history of humanity demonstrates a coherent pattern and development; all relationships between people are founded on the relationships of production,[27] and these relationships, due to the monetary system of exchange in society, have given rise to the class struggle.[28] This struggle arises from a basic alienation which every person suffers, whether he belongs to the proletariat or the bourgeois class,[29] which inhibits him from being fully man. The only way of abolishing this alienation, leaving man free to pass from the 'kingdom of necessity' to the 'kingdom of liberty', is by destroying the monetary system of exchange, using the socialization of the means of production in the name of the proletariat as a first step. After the revolution the proletariat will cease to be an alienated class, for society will no longer have classes: with the disappearance of the capitalist (owner) class, the producer will no longer be alienated from his production.[30]

According to Kolakowski, typical of Marxist thought is its emphasis on historicism: the rejection of any interpretation of society which sets out from the point of view of an absolute ethic, and an emphasis both on those basic divisions of society which have most influenced history's development and on the force of that historic law which predicts the inevitability of the socialist system.[31]

[25] 'K. Marx is one of the most radical proponents of the myth of self-determinism,' Zylstra, *op. cit.* For the background to his humanism *cf.* I. Berlin, *Karl Marx: his Life and Environment* (London, 1960), chapter 2, 'Childhood and Adolescence': 'Marx also believed in perfectability and rationality; i.e.: the intelligibility of the process of social evolution; society inevitably progressive; its movement always ahead, each step being closer to the rational ideal than its predecessor' (p. 30).
[26] F. Engels in his work *Socialism: Utopic and Scientific* demonstrates the differences.
[27] *The 1844 Manuscripts*; *Grundrisse*; *cf.* B. Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Critique of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge, 1971).
[28] 'The history of every society which has existed until now is the history of the class struggle,' *Communist Manifesto;* also *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France.*
[29] *The Holy Family*; *Capital; cf.* D. Bell, 'The Debate on Alienation' in L. Labedz *et al.*, *Revisionism* (London, 1962).
[30] *The 1844 Manuscripts*; *The German Ideology*; *Critique of the Gotha Programme.*
[31] Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 180; *cf.* also H. W. Laidler, *Social Economic Movements* (New York, 1949), ch. 16.

Marxist anthropology can be tentatively resumed in the following mini-thesis: man creates himself in his struggle to subdue nature; man humanizes nature; he is the thinking product of his practical activity and the myths of his conscience are due solely to his alienations, whose real source must be revealed and overcome.[32]

In the central part of this study we will try first to summarize briefly Marx's concept of man. Secondly we shall dedicate a little more space to a consideration of the concept in those two branches which have sprung from the main trunk of Marxist thought, Marxism-Leninism and 'revisionism'. Thirdly we shall point out the most serious objections which Marxism has put against the Christian faith and also the basic differences which Christianity finds between its concept of man and that of Marxism. Finally, we hope to embark upon a creative discussion whose principal purpose will be to call upon evangelical biblical faith to reconsider, in the light of the challenge of Marxism, both the concept of man which it possesses in practice, and the practical consequences derived from this debate for the life and mission of the church.

Methodologically, we are concerned that the debate does not remain on a purely theoretical plane (which can lead to an easy escapism) nor on the level of a discussion of the practical effects of the theory (where it is easy to subordinate the ends to the means), but rather that it incorporates a reflection on theory as the *foundation obligation* and *possibility* of *praxis* (which we understand to be both the prophets' and apostles' understanding of the relationship between faith and obedience). We have already stressed that the relationship between theory and practice, hearing and doing the word, is one of the critical points in the debate between man and man in the two systems.

3. The vision of man: principal themes

a. Man in the thinking of Karl Marx

Marx's thought, which had already been established in essence by the time he wrote the 1844 manuscripts, can be summarized in four interrelated stages.[33] (The divisions are mine and not Marx's.)

The most basic stage, the one from which his materialism is derived, is the *negation of any essence in man.*[34] According to Marx, there does not exist in man any essential residue (his being) which somehow is impervious to change. If Marx were to have used biblical categories to express himself, he would have denied that man is created in the image of a personal and infinite God, an image that belongs to all men irrespective of time and place. From this negation Marx draws two very important conclusions. (1) Man belongs exclusively to matter. He is to be distinguished from the rest of nature by being its reflexive part (man is nature turned conscious). In stating this view of man Marx aligns himself with 'scientific humanism' (amongst whose modern representatives can be found the distinguished scientist Jacques Monod),[35] which places the principal distinction between the animal kingdom and man in the superior development of the latter's brain. (2) Man is changeable. Wherever matter exists, and for Marx it is eternal, infinite and unlimited, mutability reigns. This idea gives rise to the concept of dialectical materialism, according to which man is a perpetually flowing stream of consciousness.

In brief, for Marx man arises from nature, in the full sense of the word 'arise'. Marx divides all anthropologies into two possible groups: materialism (oneself) and idealism (everyone else).

The second stage is intimately linked to the first one. *Man is the aggregate of his social relationships.*[36] Man arises from his context in society in the full sense of the word 'arise'. Criticizing Feuerbach's anthropology, Marx says that man's essence is not an abstraction in man. He is the aggregate of his social relationships.[37] From this argument Marx concludes that it is precisely man's social existence which determines his conscience and not the opposite way round (*i.e.*, for man *praxis* antecedes theory). Everyone acts according to his material circumstances, and in particular his economic relationships.

The third stage that we can encounter in Marx appears as a development of the idea that man arises from matter: *man realizes himself through work.*[38] His work is to be understood as the

[32] Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

[33] The following bibliography on Marx's anthropology may be helpful: A. Schaff, *op. cit.*; L. Althusser, *op. cit.*, B. Delfgaauw, *The Young Marx* (London, 1967); L. Dupré, *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism* (New York, 1966); A. Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London, 1971); V. Venable, *Human Nature: The Marxian View* (London, 1946); L. Farré, 'El Hombre según el Materialismo Dialéctico' (*Filosofía*, XXIV, 92, 93, 1965), pp. 23-49; G. A. Wetier and E. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York, 1961).

[34] *Cf.* A. Schaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 169; Farré, *op. cit.*, p. 23; Althusser, *op. cit.*, p. 187; E. Fromm, 'The Application of Humanist Psycho-Analysis and Marx's Theory' in E. Fromm *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

[35] *Cf. Chance and Necessity* (London, 1972).

[36] *Cf.* A. Schaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 109, 118-120; I. Svitak, 'The source of Socialist Humanism' in E. Fromm *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 17; I. Berlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-27; Mao Tse-Tung, *On Practice*, p. 499.

[37] *Thesis on Feuerbach.*

[38] *Cf.* A. Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 164; G. A. Wetier, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19; Zylstra, *op. cit.*, Garaudy, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

subjecting and forming of matter. Man creates himself by the creative act of his labour. At the same time, this concept helps to explain Marx's very precise view of man's alienation.[39] Man is alienated from himself by the bad use of his labour, and as a result of his economy. History demonstrates a continual struggle to achieve a greater superiority in the possession of property. This possession has always given man a greater say in the exercise of political power (*the economic factor predominates over the political*). This whole process began when man passed from a society which practised community property to one which encouraged private property.[40] The proletarian is alienated both within himself and from his fellows because another expropriates the work of his hand for his own benefit. The bourgeois person, on the other hand, is alienated from everyone because he has converted all human relationships into money transactions.

The fourth and final stage appears as a development of the idea that man arises from his social relationships: *man realises himself by making (or changing) history.*[41] The identification which Marx presupposes between the nature of man and his social relationships explains the strong emphasis which he places on *praxis*: man is man, not when he is meditating, but when he is transforming the objective world freely (he is *homo laborans*). If he loses this possibility he loses his humanity. The only way he can recuperate the possibility is by means of the revolution, the final phase of the class struggle. Marx speaks of pre-history which is the conflictive part of human history, and history proper (after the revolution) which he calls the kingdom of liberty, where there will exist no more coercion nor limitation. History proper, freed from all class antagonisms, is the place of man's complete humanization.

In the first two stages, Marx explains man's origin: matter and the aggregate of his social relationships. In the third and fourth stages he defines man from the point of view of his action: in nature and in history. It may also be seen, from this brief study, that his twin concepts of alienation (or evil) and revolution (or salvation) are closely linked to his starting-point in man.

Marx places himself firmly within a Hebrew cultural background when he speaks of 'total' man or 'being-in-species' (*Gattungswesen*).[42] He avoids, apparently, the idealist dichotomy of Greek culture, which can best be understood as the consequence of a speculative escapist tendency. On the contrary, he makes of man a 'being-in-history'.[43]

On the other hand, he also follows the basic presuppositions of the Enlightenment, when he emphasizes the fact that man is the only subject of his own history; it is as he, alone, becomes aware of the causes of his alienation and the objective laws of the historical process that he can achieve his true selfhood.

According to Marx, man must be 'total', personal and self-activating (*selbsttätig*).[44]

b. Development in the Marxist concept of man

(i) *Marxism-Leninism.* Lenin's contribution to Marxist theory is very much disputed. In general terms, however, we can affirm that one of his most significant points was to propose and develop the thesis of imperialism as the last phase of capitalism. Capitalist expansion necessitated more and more markets for its products. In order to secure these markets the capitalist nations were forced to enter into such severe competition amongst themselves that they were involuntarily brought to the point of war.[45]

Lenin called capitalism 'moribund imperialism' because of its recurrent crises and because of its naked and aggressive exploitation of the colonial countries. Like Marx and Engels before him, he expected to see, especially after the first world war, the sudden and complete shipwreck of the whole capitalist system.

In reality, contrary to the example of Marx and

[39] Althusser, *op. cit.*, p. 187; Wetier, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-24. 'Marx pointed out four aspects of alienation in capitalism. First, man is alienated from the product of his work. . . . Second, he is alienated in *the process of production* itself . . . Work is not an end, but a means. Third, he is alienated in *himself*. He is a social being, whose social needs are not satisfied by capitalism. Finally, he is alienated from his *neighbour* . . . who becomes his competitor': Zylstra, *op. cit. Cf.* also D. McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, Part 2, ch. 1.

[40] *Cf.* Marx, *Capital*, ch. 26, 'The Secret of Primitive Accumulation'; Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ch. 9, 'Barbarism and Civilization'.

[41] *Cf.* W. Ash, *Marxism and Moral Concepts* (New York, 1964), pp. 112-114; M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York, 1949), p. 149.

[42] *Cf.* D. McLellan, *Marx's Grundrisse* (St Albans, 1973), p. 23; O. Schatz and E. Winter, 'Alienation, Marxism and Humanism: A Christian Viewpoint' in E. Fromm *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

[43] Ogletree, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.

[44] Marx paints a utopic picture of the future state of man in Communist society in various of his works. For the details consult M. Fritzhand, 'Marx's Ideal of Man' in E. Fromm *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-165; D. McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, Part 2, ch. 8.

[45] Lenin, *Imperialism* (see note 23); Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism, passim;* R. Conquest, *Where Marx Went Wrong* (London, 1970), ch. 4; A. P. Mendel, in *Essential Works of Marxism*, ch. 11.

Engels, Lenin's contribution did not consist so much in his theorizing as in his practice, what he accomplished by bringing about the first ever revolution inspired by Marx. If it is true that Marx turned Hegel upside down,[46] Lenin also turned Marx on his head. According to Plekhanov, Lenin was not so much a theoretician of Marx as of the revolution. As P. Lehmann asserts, 'Lenin transformed the Marxist analysis of the power of ideology into an ideology of power'.[47] His most faithful sons are all those who conceive the revolution strictly in terms of the conquest of power.[48] In other words, Lenin, appealing to the idea of progress in Marxist thought, changed the basis of Marxist theory from the predominance of economic factors as the substructure which *explains* the whole of history to the predominance of the political factors which *changes* it.

Due to the accelerating changes taking place at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, Lenin came to the conclusion that the Second International no longer served as a revolutionary force. Faced by the power of 'financial capitalism' it compromised and became impotent. He began, therefore, to reorganize the revolutionary forces for a final assault on western imperialism.[49] In his book *What Shall Be Done?* (1902) he presents the dictatorship of the proletariat in terms of the dictatorship of the Communist party. The development of this idea is the key to understanding the whole subsequent historical development of Marxism-Leninism and its contemporary offshoots.[50] From then on it was the party, and largely Lenin within the party, who decided which course history should take.

In practice he showed himself to be very far distant from the 'democratic' participatory practice opted for by Marx in the days of the First International.[51] Marx placed his confidence in the course of history, *i.e.*, in the natural and inevitable ruin of capitalism. He also believed that the proletariat would take hold of the reins of history, its history, in order to bring into being a new society, without a party and without classes.

Lenin, on the other hand, did not have confidence in the predetermined course of the successive stages of capitalism. Neither did he trust the proletariat in general as the true generator of all history, subsequent to the revolution.

The drastic change from Marx's theory to Lenin's revolutionary practice produced a profound effect in the latter's 'socialist humanism'. The implantation first of the party and then, as an extension of this, of the whole apparatus of the state as the arbiter of history, involved substantial changes in the way in which a Communist society of the future would be achieved. In effect, the desired 'new man' would have to be created by the organization of a centralized state power.[52]

Classically, the function of ethics has been to direct and orientate every human activity in the light of a totality (in Christianity, for example, in the light of the totality of a transcendent revelation). For Marx, this totality was the unavoidable direction of history as it moved dialectically from a class-bound to a classless society. For Lenin, on the other hand, the totality was the ideology of 'the iron will', exercised by an exclusive group which had captured the state power.

For Marx, history becomes relatively autonomous because it obeys laws which are imminent to its trajectory. For Lenin, on the other hand, history must be subordinated to the demands of a new theory: 'Without a revolutionary theory there cannot be a revolutionary movement' (*Complete Works*, IV, p. 380). Thus, in practice, in spite of all disclaimers, theory still predominates over practice in Lenin's thought. In consequence, man has to obey a *new interpretation of history* which is essentially non-Marxist.

(ii) *Revisionism.* Within the Marxist camp 'revisionism' is a label which is used depreciatingly. We use it in a neutral sense to describe every Marxist theorist or activist who disagrees with Lenin's voluntarist interpretation of Marx or who disas-

[46] *The 1844 Manuscripts.*

[47] 'La Teología cristiana en un mundo en Revolución' in Ogletree *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[48] *E.g.*, Mao Tse-Tung, 'Long Live Leninism' in Mendel, *op. cit.*, *passim*; R. Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution* (New York, 1967) (although in the last five years or so he has modified his opinion in this respect); Che Guevara, 'Guerilla Warfare: A Method' in G. Lavan (ed.), *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings* (New York, 1967). F. Castro believed that the objective preconditions for the revolution could be caused by the armed section of a minority group, even when comparatively small, as long as it was disciplined and determined. *Cf.* R. Conquest, *op. cit.*, ch. 9.

[49] Stalin, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-222.

[50] *Cf.* the magnificent analysis of the cultural and historical origin of Russian Communism in N. Berdyaev, *The Sources and Meaning of Russian Communism* (London, 1937), especially ch. 6. According to him, because the first proletariat revolution had to be brought about in an agrarian society, 'Lenin placed himself within the current of populist socialism, affirming that in Russia the revolution has to be original.' The Leninist ideology erected the revolutionary will into absolute truth.

[51] Although Marx also acted individualistically and arbitrarily when he established the headquarters of the First International in New York, an act which effectively caused its dissolution. *Cf.* I. Berlin, *op. cit.*, ch. 9.

[52] Another of Lenin's departures from Marx's theories; *cf.* M. Buber, *Caminos de Utopía* (Mexico, 1955), chs. VIII and IX.

sociates himself from Lenin's revolutionary orthodoxy.[53]

According to this definition one of the first of the revisionists was Rosa Luxemburg (died in 1919), who was keenly critical of what she considered to be the Machiavellism of the Bolsheviks, agreeing with Marx's principle that 'government only hears its own voice, and demands that the people share the same illusion'. She stated that 'freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the person who thinks in another way, its efficacy vanishes when "freedom" becomes a special privilege'.[54] (This statement, naturally, is valid for any kind of dictatorial regime.)

One of the most remarkable characteristics of revisionism is the desire to return to the right of the individual or group openly to discuss the current teaching of the Communist party's magisterium, in defence of a socialism which would be more integral and more human. The old left, due to the 'triumphalism' of the Stalinist era, had become paralysed in opportunist structures. The new left proposes a new hermeneutic of Marx's writings with the idea of creatively applying to new situations his conceptual analysis. In other words it claims to be a Marxist criticism of Marxism which takes seriously the way in which capitalism has progressed and changed in the last 100 years.[55] It seeks to be a dynamic type of Marxism, *propter semper reformanda*. In the sections which follow we will note some of its main characteristics.

(1) *Its attitude towards freedom.* One of the most serious objections levelled against 'maximalist' Marxism is that it has resolutely opposed the western tradition of independent non-authoritarian thinking won only after many prolonged struggles.[56] This objection must not be confused with an attitude which is favourably disposed to neo-capitalism, as official Marxist propaganda would like to make out,[57] nor understood as a truce with bourgeois reactionary forces, whatever form they may take. On the contrary, in so far as revisionism has arisen in those countries which have abolished the capitalist system of the means of production, it fights against an excessive centralization of state power and against the delay in the implementation of a society which is truly collectivist.[58] In other words, taking seriously Marx's distinction between pre-history and history, it proposes a pluralism of 'non-antagonistic' ideas within a society which supposedly has already abolished the class system.[59]

(2) *The importance of the individual.* According to Marx the individual as he actually exists is not a free being but the object of various social circumstances which impede the full development of his personality. Once these barriers have been destroyed, man's personality has every chance of being created freely. In those societies which have passed through a Marxist revolution, sometimes due to the challenge of western existentialist philosophy, the fundamental question of the place, purpose and worth of the individual has insistently arisen. As Adam Schaff recognizes, the idea of the individual is the starting-point for any philosophy of man; every type of reflection depends upon the question, What is the human individual? As far as Schaff is concerned the central problem of the individual rests in the ambiguous nature of an approach to ethics without absolutes, and also in the real meaning of happiness.[60] It is the concern of these Marxists to recover the individual's initiative in the process of reconstructing society: 'The task of man is not simply to walk in the direction history takes but to move history in a human direction'.[61]

(3) *The possibility of new alienations.* Admission to failures and retrogressions in the process of man's socialization is perhaps the most important characteristic of the new left. At least it is a sign that it takes history seriously and this for two reasons. (a) Man can be a responsible author of the historical process only if it is possible for him to be wrong; if a man or a party is incapable of error they can never advance beyond endless historical justifications of the actual *status quo*. (b) It admits that the aggregate of man's social relationships changes quite substantially from one generation to another. In taking history seriously it responds, in theory at least, to the spirit of Marx. It is not surprising, then, that revisionism is well known for its withering attacks on the self-justification of any socialist system which has shown itself to be incapable of sustaining revolutionary impulse. Part

[53] When China accuses Russia of having fallen into 'revisionism', it is thinking of something else. Its criticism, apparently, is directed against (a) its compromising attitude towards capitalism, and (b) its imperialistic territorial claims along the border with China.

[54] Conquest, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 93.

[55] Kolakowski, 'Permanent vs. Transitory Aspects of Marxism' (see note 13).

[56] *Cf.* especially the allocution of Solzhenitzyn pronounced on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Prize for literature.

[57] *E.g.*, Mao Tse-Tung in 'Combat Liberalism' in *Essential works of Marxism.*

[58] E. Bloch, 'Man and Citizen according to Marx' in E. Fromm *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 204: 'The rights of man under socialism are essentially the rights of an objective and practical criticism, in order to advance the construction of Socialism within a structure of solidarity.'

[59] Farré, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[60] Schaff dedicates the whole of his book to the elaboration of a consistent reply to this problematical question.

[61] Girardi, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

of this self-justification manifests itself in the unwarranted assumption that by calling a movement a revolution the old class society is automatically abolished. Such crude propaganda, according to Althusser, very often is a cover up for a new kind of class privilege.[62]

It is Djilas who has best demonstrated the essentially class nature of the *aparatchiks* who arose as a logical consequence of Lenin's particular revolution. The party's initiative is transformed into the traditional oligarchy of a new class which sees an almost pathological need to suppress every person or group which shows any propensity to having different ideas. The inevitable outcome of any Communist party which has come to power is that 'the former grows weaker whilst the class grows stronger'.[63]

The fundamental problem, then, of the post-revolutionary society is not increasing bureaucracy, as Trotsky and many modern Marxists imagine, but the *appearance of a new class* who effectively control the means of production. This is the reality. So as Djilas maintains, 'It is an historical illusion which is sustained by a new alienating ideology that socialism has already been completed as the first stage of Communism,' for the proletariat has once again been suppressed by an institution which is wholly inaccessible to them. Thus, the central problem for the new left is how to ensure that the proletariat really is, in practice, the last class.[64]

(4) *The decentralization of power.* One of the theoretical solutions to this problem most widely held amongst the new left is that the manual worker should be allowed to participate fully in the duties of government. Goldmann says, for example, that the 'self-administration' of the workers would seem to be the only possible foundation for an authentically socialist programme in the modern world.[65] The Communist countries of Europe have apparently already abandoned the attempt to construct a true socialism in which the popular masses are the real owners of the means of production and really participate in the profits realized. In order for this to happen, there would have to be a totally new revolution in which the party is deprived of its administrative monopoly.[66] M. Buber, a little idealistically, suggests that, if the means of production were to pass effectively into the hands of the nation as such, then small communities would have to be formed, made up of diverse groups, to ensure that the people became the true subjects of the process of production. The demands of collectivity ought to rule the affairs of state.[67]

We have tried to do justice to certain Marxist ideas concerning man, and particularly man as he is placed in society. We have noted that, under the pressure of very different circumstances from those in which Marxist theory originally arose, certain fundamental changes have been made in practice. We would, however, want to stress once more that Marxist theory is much more homogeneous than Marxist practice and that, therefore, the philosophical substratum which underlines its basic anthropology has not undergone any radical, or even very significant, transformation. The problem of fitting a relatively systematized theory to the complex reality of man is as much a problem for Marxism as it is for any other contemporary philosophy or ideology, particularly when it is set within an inflexible humanist framework.

Before trying to get at the root causes of the failure of Marxism to produce a totally adequate anthropology, from a Christian point of view, we should be genuinely open to listen to those criticisms which the Marxists of the Christian-Marxist dialogue have thought it necessary to make of the Christian faith.

(iii) *The Marxist criticism of Christian anthropology.* (1) Every religion, according to Marx, demonstrates the existence of a falsified conscience. Belief in any kind of object beyond man and his world reveals man's search for a compensation, a substitutionary recompense produced because of his inability to terminate his relationships of alienation.

(2) Religion is an integral part of the superstructure of any human culture. It arises as a necessary consequence of man's economic substructure.[68] As the superstructure responds to an alienated substructure, religion is also a logical extension of this alienation. Inversely, when the alienation ceases, religion will also disappear.

(3) Following the thought of Feuerbach, Marx concludes that man is alone in the universe. If he was not alone he would be dependent upon something or someone. But no form of dependence

[62] *Op. cit.*, p. 196.
[63] 'The New Class' in *Essential Works of Marxism*, p. 321. After the revolution, the new class changes its original revolutionary ideology for a static apologetic ideology; *cf.* L. Goldmann, 'Socialism and Humanism' in E. Fromm *et al.*, *op. cit.*
[64] M. Buber, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-18.
[65] 'Socialism and the Problem of Alienation' in *ibid.*, pp. 281f.
[66] 'Socialism and Humanism' in *ibid.*, pp. 46, 49.
[67] *Op. cit.*, p. 197.
[68] The relationship between the substructure and the superstructure in Marx's thought is very well clarified in letters which Engels wrote towards the end of his life; *e.g.*, his letters to Conrad Schmidt, Heinz Starkenburg, Joseph Bloch and Franz Mehring.

can be squared with that absolute liberty which is necessary if man is going to be the real and not imaginary subject of his own history.[69]

(4) Whatever kind of religion may be imagined, its real force lies in its ability to project human aspirations from this world to a world beyond the grave. This being so, no religion can finally and absolutely dedicate itself to changing this world; it will tend rather to support the *status quo* in this life so that it can concentrate undisturbed on the next.

(5) Part of the attack that Marx launched against Hegel in the latter part of his *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts* had to do with Hegel's defence of the Prussian state. Marx considered that this defence was a logical conclusion of his idea of a transcendent universal Spirit which somehow guaranteed the necessity of everything that existed. Confusing Hegel's universal Spirit with the Christian God, Marxists have often tried to point out that Christianity is likewise bound to defend the powers that be, because these are always, automatically, decreed by God.[70]

(6) But the Marxist criticism of religion is even more subtle and challenging. Marx used the Hegelian dialectic to analyse trans-human relationships from the very earliest times up to his own century. It is well known that Marx divided human history into consecutive ages, each one following the other with complete inevitability. He begins with the primitive community society and follows on to society based on slavery; then feudal society, guild-society and capitalist society.[71] Each of these societies arose as a result of a certain historical necessity. Religion also arose of necessity. It too has changed according to changing historical circumstances. History, however, has now reached its final stage. With the coming of the working class as a 'class for itself', and with the break-up of capitalist society, prehistory has finally reached its limit. When real history is initiated, all religion will become totally superfluous.[72]

(7) The fact that Marxism has erected itself into a historical science has meant that it rejects every point of view which goes beyond strictly scientific controls. 'The religious solution is unacceptable for everyone who does not want to reject the scientific point of view,' says Schaff.[73] Moreover, Garaudy rejects the notion that the development of human history since Marx now makes the search for transcendence outside of man absolutely imperative. Garaudy believes that transcendence is already present in the complete break with the old order and the ushering in of a new one. The transcendence of man is not an attribute of his nature which was printed on him on the first day of creation, but rather of his culture, the work of history, man creating himself as he goes along. Man continually transcends himself as he freely develops his material and spiritual capacities.[74] Marxism, therefore, naturally rejects any idea of man's salvation coming to him from outside as a gift, on the grounds that such a notion empties of any significance man's efforts to construct a better world.[75]

(8) Finally, Marxism criticizes the Christian faith for its belief in an absolute ethic. The Marxist in his search for an ethic which is consistent to his thought system sets out from two basic premises: (a) man's central problem is always social and not individual; (b) history is a project which continues to be realized indefinitely.[76] According to Schaff, any absolute ethic shows its bankruptcy when a situation rises in which contradictory precepts are equally applicable. The only way of solving such a problem is by choosing the solution which is closest to a scientific analysis of man in society.[77] This analysis arises from an evaluation of those social conditions which are most necessary in order to guarantee man's happiness.[78]

[69] Marx's hero, as he was also that of Fichte, Goethe, Schiller and Nietzsche, is Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods. *Cf.* Zylstra, *op. cit.*; I. Lepp, *op. cit.*, pp. 64. 'The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man' (Marx, *Early Texts*, p. 122).

[70] Although Engels was prepared to admit that the first Christian community had some value as a protest movement in the first centuries.

[71] *E.g.*, *The Communist Manifesto*; Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*

[72] According to the Marxist theorist G. Klaus, the insights of dialectical materialism make all religion superfluous. *Cf.* H.-G. Koch, *The Abolition of God* (London, 1963), p. 171.

[73] *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

[74] 'The Meaning of Life and History in Marx and Teilhard de Chardin' in B. Towers *et. al.*, *Evolution, Marxism and Christianity* (London, 1968), pp. 68, 69.

[75] A. C. Dyson, 'Marxism, Evolution and the Person of Christ' in *ibid.*, p. 77.

[76] *Cf.* Schaff., *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 57; 137-51.

[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 143; Berlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 147; K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London, 1948): 'Moral decisions . . . are based on scientific historical prophecy; they are not based on any moral system.'

[78] Schaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 234, 235; W. Ash, *op. cit.*, pp. 108ff.