MARX'S REFUTATION OF CHRISTIANITY

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INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

The greater portion of the world is involved in a struggle between the East and the West. This struggle assumes different aspects to different interest groups: to the businessman it is of an economic nature, to the military man it is a reminder of open aggression along the "Cold War" front, to the statesman it is a conflict between democratic and Communistic forms of government.

How does the Christian view this clash? Christianity is concerned with the whole man and must consider Communism's effect upon the whole man. Communism must be reckoned with as a complete ideology fighting for the minds of men. D. M. Mackinnon, in a study of Communism from the Anglican perspective, has written:

> It is easy to criticize Marx's doctrines piecemeal; to argue in company with modern economists against his theory of value, and in company with positivists, idealists, or scholastics against his theory of knowledge and his conception of reality. But the strength of Marxism lies in all these different elements taken together; for then it presents what has hardly a rival in the present-day world, a body of doctrine in which philosophy, natural science, social science, all come together and illuminate one another.[1]

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1 Donald M. Mackinnon, Christian Faith and Communist Faith, London, 1953, p. 18.

This reckoning cannot be one of over-simplification as is often done in the name of religion. Alexander Miller has warned that it cannot merely be reduced to such black and white terms as:

> Communism is materialistic and Christianity is a spiritual religion . . . or, Communism does away with private property while classic doctrine holds it necessary to man's true good . . . or, Communism attacks the sanctity of family life, which Christianity cherishes as an ordinance of God.[1]

Rather, an earnest effort must be made to understand the implications of the Communist system.

It will be the purpose of this research to analyze the ideology set forth by the alleged originator of Communism, Karl Marx. More specifically it will examine the conflicts that Marx felt between his philosophy and Christianity and the arguments with which he refuted Christianity.

Marx felt that religion directly contradicted his philosophy and had to be dealt with. At one point he wrote, "The criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism."[2] Marx writes predominantly against religion in general but on occasion focuses upon Christianity in particular. However, since Christianity was the prevailing religion in the world of his day, nineteenth century Europe,

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1 Alexander Miller, The Christian Significance of Karl Marx, New York, 1947, p. 2.

2 Karl Marx, quoted in Vladimar Lenin, Religion, New York, 1933, p. 3.

it may be reasoned that Christianity was his chief religious concern.

B. Significance of the Problem

The importance of studying the thinking behind a force which is dedicated to world domination should be evident. Premier Khrushchev has vowed in his oft-quoted statement, "Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!"[1] The Communist powers have composed a schedule predicting the date of each nation's fall into their hands. Such a power must be reckoned with.

Communism by its very nature is an atheistic philosophy. C. E. Raven of England has stated, "There are many who feel that, unless Christianity can come to an understanding of the power of Communism . . . , the future may well lie rather with the new religion than the old."[2]

Although the conflict is global, much of the Free World and also the Christian community has remained oblivious to it. But the vanguard of the Church, its missionary force, has not been afforded this luxury. The Christian Church established by missionaries in lands threatened by Communism is considered by many to be the last re-

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1 John K. Jessup and the Editors of "Life," Communism, the Nature of Your Enemy, New York, 1962, p. 5.

2 C. E. Raven, quoted in John Macmurray, Creative Society, New York, 1939, p. 8.

maining deterrent to the onslaught. M. Richard Shaull, in his book, Encounter with Revolution, writes, "The ultimate destiny of the world, and of every country in it, depends upon the strength of the younger churches and their willingness to be thrust out into the world and crucified for it."[1]

The American public has been made aware in some measure of the physical sacrifices and the intellectual efforts required to cope with the Communists in the recent best selling novel, The Ugly American. The experiences of Father Finian portray the ordeals of a devoted Christian who encountered Communism face to face. This conscientious priest was convinced that he would have to match the dedication and ingenuity of the Communists if he was to gain a hearing for Christianity. Finian realized, as all the Free World must realize, that Communism has to be fought on all levels, the grass-roots as well as the intellectual.[2]

C. Delimitation of the Problem

This thesis will concern itself with the original thinking of Marx in his refuting of Christianity. It is difficult to deal with the primary sources in this case

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1 M. Richard Shaull, Encounter with Revolution, New York, 1955, p. 137.

2 William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, The Ugly American, Greenwich, Conn., 1958, pp. 38ff.

as many of his works have not been translated into English. Further, to complicate matters, Marx did not write a complete analysis of his views on the subject of religion.

However, as his works are examined, from the scholarly treatises to the pamphlets filled with revolutionary spirit, his thinking on religion becomes apparent. In addition, much of Marx's thinking has been preserved in the writings of Engels and Lenin and these may be treated as an extension of Marx's writings.

Communism has evolved since the days of Marx to meet the challenge of a changing world. Yet the basic goals and doctrines remain unchanged. Marx's thought is still revered as the genius of the Communist system, and his writings, along with those of Engels and Lenin, are considered completely authoritative. Indeed, in the religion of Communism they are referred to as "scripture."

D. Method of Procedure

The subject will be developed in four chapters. The first chapter deals with the factors which affected Marx's development of thought: the revolutionary ideas which became prominent in his day in the natural sciences and the philosophies. The adapting of the dialectic method of Hegel to the materialism of Feuerbach is traced.

Marx refuted Christianity on two counts: its philosophical basis and its practical application. Chapter two

is concerned with Marx's criticism of religious philosophy and of Christian doctrine in particular. The third chapter sets forth his assertion of the impracticality of Christianity on the grounds of the Church's hypocritical ethical principles.

Chapter four is a brief survey of theological thought regarding Marx's philosophy as his philosophy has been developed by twentieth century socialism. The views of Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth are summarily presented.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

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A. Introduction

Every man is, to a large extent, a product of his times. Those who philosophize about the situation of mankind do so in terms of their environment, attacking or supporting the institutions of their day. Marx was no exception. To understand his thinking, a survey of the world of his day is helpful. This chapter presents a brief sketch of his period, mid-nineteenth century Europe.

B. Biographical Sketch of Karl Marx

1. The Person

Karl Marx was born at Treves, Germany, in 1818. His was a middle-class Jewish family which claimed a long succession of rabbis on both sides of the family. Karl's father, however, not bound by tradition, had broken the rabbinical succession by turning to law. When Karl, the eldest child, was six, the family forsook Judaism for Protestantism. It is speculated that this change was to spare the children from the social stigma attached to Judaism and not because of doctrinal reasons. The parents evidently attempted to give Karl every available advantage.

Marx showed brilliance in his childhood studies, and all acquaintances of the family expected him to achieve greatness in the field of his choice. His years at the

university of Berlin were fruitful but undirected. Karl studied zealously, yet in such diversified fields that upon graduation he was not qualified to enter a profession. Young Marx was too intrigued with the ideas of his generation to leave the intellectual world and settle into a comfortable profession. He had no interest in securing a position which would afford him financial security, nor did he ever develop such an interest. This vocational shortcoming was to plague him and his family throughout all his career.[1]

2. The Times

The world of his youth confronted him with revolutionary thinking on all sides. Transition was evident everywhere. The old feudal system had fallen before the economic power of capitalism. With the aid of technological discoveries, a new class had risen to power. The aristocracy had been displaced both economically and politically by the middle-class, the bourgeoisie.[2]

In France the bourgeoisie had come to power through a series of revolutions until by means of a coup in 1830 they controlled the country. In England the rise to power was less meteoric, but after a long succession of compromises the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832 enabled

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1 Otto Ruhle, Karl Marx, His Life and Work, New York, 1943, p. 26.

2 Frank W. Price, Marx Meets Christ, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 16.

the bourgeoisie virtually to rule the nation. Germany, because of its inland position, lagged behind the other nations in developing a capitalistic economy, but in the first decades of the nineteenth century the tide of economic change made itself felt. Through a bloodless revolution the bourgeoisie made great economic and political gains. Germany was the center of philosophical thought and these transitions incurred speculative implications. The German bourgeoisie embraced Hegelianism and applied its precepts to the state which they controlled. The basic premise was, "All the real is rational and all the rational is real."[1] Germany was to be a"constitutional state," completely rational and therefore ideal. This was the Germany into which Marx entered.

C. The Influences Upon Marx's Thinking

Marx desired to understand his times. How could these transitions be explained? What would the future bring? He felt the world to be on the brink of still greater change and that philosophy was to be the key to understanding this change. At the age of twenty-six he surmised, "As the Reformation began in those days in the mind of a monk, so today it must begin in the mind of a

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1 Ruhle, op. cit., p. 26.

philosopher."[1] Marx examined the philosophies of his day. He must be credited for dealing with all who were on the scene. Although sometimes his criticism was superficial, he feared to encounter no one. Sidney Hook in discussing Marx's development of thought, has stated, "He reached his position only after the most serious wrestling with alternative social, economic and philosophical views."[2] He delved into the logic of opposing theories, refuting them not merely on the grounds that they had shown themselves to be pragmatically unsound, but because he felt them to be philosophically false.

Marx felt intellectually insecure battling the philosophical titans of his day. Driven by this insecurity, he was convinced that to establish his system, all opposing philosophies had to be destroyed. He was doubtlessly influenced by the thoughts which he confronted yet seldom admitted to their being incorporated into his own thinking. However, the impact of Hegel and Feuerbach was so great that he was obliged to acknowledge his indebtedness to them. It may be said, at the risk of oversimplifying, that Marx derived the method for his system from Hegel, and the content of it from Feuerbach.[3]

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1 Price, op. cit., p. 20.

2 Sidney Hook, From Hegel to Marx, New York, 1958, p. 11.

3 Ibid., pp. 16f.

1. Hegel

a. The Demise of Hegelian Thought

Marx encountered and carefully studied the thought of Hegel during his university days in Berlin. Even then he knew that he would have to refute this system with which he disagreed. But how to go about it?

Certainly Hegelianism had proved politically impractical. After twenty years the experiment of applying Hegelian philosophy to the government of Germany had proved that "idea and reality, reason and being, showed themselves crudely opposed." Reality had not automatically become the ideal. The moral ideal proclaimed as the principle of the state conflicted with the desires of the bourgeoisie.[1] But Marx was more concerned with the philosophical and psychological invalidity of Hegel's system, than with its impracticality. In the Doctors' Club, a group of Hegel's disciples, issues were considered at the level of his liking, the philosophical level. Here it was that young philosophers such as David Strauss and Bruno Bauer criticized Christianity as having no historical value, and refuted it as being hypocritical and romantic.

For Marx this constituted the downfall, not only of Christianity, but also of theism. These criticisms, reinforced by the condemnation of Hegel's theism by Feuerbach,

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1 Ruhle, op. cit., p. 26.

resulted in the overthrow of Hegelian philosophy for Marx. Now Marx could turn to the real world, the world of social and political issues. His life became one of feverish political activity coupled with the development of a complete philosophical system.[1]

b. Marx's Criticism of Hegel

(1) On Philosophical Grounds

Marx did not dismiss Hegelian thought in summary terms. In scientific fashion he dealt point by point with Hegel's thinking as in his Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right. This is an involved treatise and only a brief presentation of his argument will be given here.

Marx opposed the spiritual idealism of Hegel's philosophy. To Marx, the core of Hegelian thought was nothing but "the speculative expression of the Christian-Germanic dogma of the opposition between spirit and matter, God and the world."[2] For Hegel, the basic dualism existed between the infinite and the finite. In so postulating Hegel dismissed the traditional dualisms such as those between mind and matter, self and society. These traditional dualisms had been this-worldly in nature, whereas Hegel's dualism was other-worldly. The dualism was now

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1 Ibid., pp. 26-33.

2 Karl Marx, The Holy Family, quoted in Hook, op. cit., p. 117.

between man and a supreme being. While in former philosophies, interactions had been on a human level and within man's control, they were now in the hands of a transcendent spirit.

In applying this dualism to mankind, Hegel considered man as nothing but matter until the spirit of the transcendent God entered his consciousness. Only when man knew God in this way did he know true reality. Thus reality existed only in the realm of thought.[1]

Hegel considered his system religious and his logic "a rational theology." To him history was the development of thoughts originating with God and given to man in a logical and necessary sequence. History was therefore ordered by God. To Marx this was ignoring reality. Since Marx regarded the essence of all religion as a means of escaping reality, he described Hegel's system as "the final expression of traditional religion."[2]

(2) On Pragmatic Grounds

Marx weighed the ramifications of Hegel's idealism. Does not this thinking sanction the status quo merely because its origin and existence can be rationally explained? Hegel proposed that history progressed by an "automatic

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1 Karl Marx, The Holy Family, quoted in Ruhle, op. cit., p. 83.

2 Hook, op. cit., p. 18.

process," guided from above. These ideas were adopted by the Christian socialists against whom Marx continually revolted. Marx claimed that only by conscious action can man progress. What theoretically should evolve can only be achieved by practice. "Practice" ultimately came to mean revolution for Marx.[1]

Marx was attracted to Hegel because of his philosophy of history, which reviewed the course of history and did offer an explanation of the present in light of the past. Marx, however, criticized Hegel for limiting philosophy merely to hindsight, a contemplation and explanation of what has aleady happened. He disagreed when Hegel wrote, "Philosophy came too late to teach the world what it should be."[2]

For Marx philosophy had to justify itself by enabling man to deal with the concrete problems of his day. "Philosophy is not introspective insight into the past; it is prospective anticipation of the future. It explains why the present is what it is in order to make it different."[3]

Again the realistic thinking of Marx is evident. Again his adamant insistence on the acceptance of his views is perceived. What was the driving force behind this in-

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1 Hook, op. cit., p. 18.

2 Georg W. F. Hegel, quoted in Hook, ibid., p. 23.

3 Hook, ibid., p. 25.

sistence? Some would say it was a fanatical desire to be the leader of a world revolution. His advocates would claim that his burning desire to see justice manifested spurred him onward.

c. Marx's Adoption of the Hegelian Dialectic

Marx did recognize the validity of Hegel's method of explaining the progress of history, however. The interaction of a thesis and antithesis with the resultant emergence of a new thesis was hailed by Marx as a significant achievement. He claimed,"An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution in the human mind, can . . . only be built up in a dialectical way." [1]

The parting of the ways came when the content of the dialectic was examined. What interacted as thesis and antithesis? For Hegel, ideas played these roles. For Marx, concrete objects had to be the actors in the play of dialectic.

2. Feuerbach

Marx left few of his contemporaries unscathed. He criticized those within and without his camp. His denunciations were poured forth upon men such as Strauss, Bauer, Ruge, Stiner, and Hess.[2] Yet above these stood one to

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1 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Duhring, New York, 1939, quoted in Mandell Bober, Karl Marx's Interpretation of History, Cambridge, 1950, p. 45.

2 Hook, op. cit., pp. 7-9.

whom Marx expressed his indebtedness. This was Ludwig Feuerbach. Friedrich Engels, for many years the cohort of Marx, wrote in the preface to his work on Ludwig Feuerbach, "A full acknowledgment of the influence which Feuerbach, more than any other post-Hegelian philosopher, had upon us during our period of storm and stress, appeared to me to be an undischarged debt of honor."[1]

a. Feuerbach's Thought

(1) Concerning God

It was Feuerbach who to a large degree had toppled the system of Hegel. It has been stated that "Feuerbach was Hegel's fate."[2] In his Critique of Hegelian Philosophy, he reduced Hegel's philosophy to a "theology made over into logic," "a rational mysticism."[3] No longer was God the motivating force behind the universe. God was reduced to the "finite subjective spirit of man."[4] Man was to be considered independent, having worth in himself. He was the subject and not merely the object, capable of shaping his own destiny, of controlling the world.

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1 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 16.

2 H. Glockner, Die Voraussetzungen Der Hegeleschen Philosophie, Stuttgart, n.d., p. xviii.

3 Ludwig Feuerbach, Critique of Hegelian Philosophy, quoted in Ruhle, op. cit., p. 31.

4 Ibid., p. 32.

(2) Concerning Christianity

Feuerbach's greatest work, The Essence of Christianity, attacked the Christian faith along the same lines. He sees all "religious phenomena . . . as a projection and hypostasis of some element of human experience into an object of worship."[1] Religion and philosophy are closely allied. Philosophy isolates a certain feature of human experience from its social context and elevates it as an absolute and timeless principle. Religion does likewise, usually with a revered virtue. The difference is that the projections of religion are expressed in concrete terms, while in philosophy they are conceived abstractly.[2]

Feuerbach considered Christianity to be an expression of this. Man in his human relationships desires the ideals of love and forgiveness. Thus Feuerbach sees Christ to be the incarnation of these virtues and merely the extension of man's personality represented in physical being. Christ embodies the hope and faith which man craves - his was the highest human achievement, suffering and dying for his fellow man. Similarly man conceives God in human terms, he is a father, he has a son, he is a person. Feuerbach summed it up by stating, "What man praises and approves that

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1 Hook, op. cit., p. 226.

2 Ibid., p. 222.

is God to him."[1]

(3) Concerning Materialism

This thinking of Feuerbach was centered in the rejection of idealism and led him to accept a purely materialistic philosophy. Nothing but the material had any truth for him. "Matter is not a product of the mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter."[2]

b. Marx's Rejection of Feuerbach's Materialism

Marx eagerly concurred with Feuerbach's thinking. At last he felt himself freed from "traditional philosophy and traditional religion." His agreement with Feuerbach was, however, short-lived. Marx soon considered Feuerbach's materialism as outdated. As idealism had progressed, so had the theories of materialism. In his Theses on Feuerbach, he noted that while Feuerbach recognized the validity of materialism, he regarded material objects in an unrelated, passive sense. Marx felt that Feuerbach did not realize that the importance of materialism lies in the fact that material objects interact. Actions and processes must involve physical objects. Marx considered Feuerbach's position theoretical. He regarded it as a return to idealism.[3]

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1 Ibid., p. 246.

2 Ludwig Feuerbach, paraphrased by Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 35.

3 Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, an appendix in Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 73.

Having analyzed the thought of many philosophers, Hegel and Feuerbach in particular, Marx was ready to attempt a formulation of his own system. While rejecting several of the basic tenets in the philosophies of these two men, their thinking supplied the foundation for his philosophy. The stage was set for the development of dialectical materialism.

D. The Theory of Dialectical Materialism

Marx's development of the system of dialectical materialism cannot here be documented from primary sources, as several of his chief works on this subject, A Critique of The Hegelian Philosophy of Right, for example, have not been translated into English.[1] However, Friedrich Engels in his work, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy,[2] written in 1888, has recorded Marx's thinking during this period. Engels remains true to Marx's theories and injects little of his own opinion. Although he did contribute some material, he acknowledges Marx as the originator in every respect. In a footnote he states, "What I contributed . . . Marx could well have done without me."[3]

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1 Sarah Prakken, Books in Print, New York, 1961, p.692.

2 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 73.

3 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 52, footnote 1.

1. The Nature of the Dialectic

The dialectic is concerned with the process by which change takes place. Within all phenomena, natural or social, and within all ideas concerning these phenomena, are inherent contradictions. The dominant element in this contradiction (the thesis) and the subordinate element (the antithesis) interact to produce a synthesis of the two. This synthesis establishes itself as a new thesis which in turn is challenged by an antithesis. The process thus repeats itself, yet it is not a series of meaningless repetitions as each resultant thesis is a stride forward, an improvement upon the former thesis.[1]

2. The Universality of the Dialectic

The origins of Marx's system were certainly cosmopolitan. As Lenin wrote in the introduction to his treatise, The Teachings of Karl Marx, "Marx was the genius who continued and completed the three chief ideological currents of the nineteenth century, represented by the three most advanced countries of humanity: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines."[2] Marx hoped that the system itself would be as universal and all-inclusive as its origins that it would account for

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1 Mandell Bober, Karl Marx's Interpretation of History, Cambridge, 1950, p. 32.

2 Vladimar Lenin, The Teachings of Karl Marx, New York, 1930, p. 10.

phenomena in all aspects of experience. Above all his philosophy had to be pragmatic. When applied to concrete situations in society it had to be capable of changing them for the betterment of all mankind.

a. In the Realm of Science

Engels considered Marx to be the only philosopher who had understood and incorporated into his system the recent discoveries of the natural sciences. Science proclaimed that no longer did the physical world function according to the mechanistic principles of Newton, i.e., that all matter is composed of mutually exclusive physical units which interact externally without any internal transformations taking place. Similarly in the realm of life, no longer were all forms of life conceived as mechanisms. No longer were thoughts considered as "kaleidoscopically changing patterns made by many atomic units of sensation and feeling."[1]

The sciences now viewed the natural world as a world of interaction and consequent change. Science had progressed from the study of stative objects as final in themselves to the study of the processes in which these objects were involved. Engels wrote, "In our century it [science]

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1 Mackinnon, op. cit., p. 10.

is essentially . . . a science of the processes, of the origin and development of these things and of the interconnection which binds all these natural processes into one great whole.[1] Physiology was now the science of investigating plant and animal growth, embryology studied human growth, geology analyzed the formation of the earth.

The dialectic accounted for all such discoveries. For Marx the parts were beginning to form a unified whole and the common denominator was the principle of dialectical processes.

b. In the Realm of Society

Here was the true test: Could his philosophy do what others had failed to do? Could it change society so that all classes would benefit, not only the privileged classes?

Again Marx looked to the dialectic. If it had been valid in the natural world, would it not also be valid in society? Must not the principle of dialectic which dominated nature also be prevalent, if not dominant, in the history of mankind?[2]

Marx reasoned that humanity must evolve by the same processes as nature. Indeed the progress of man is dependent upon the progress of natural science. He does not believe, however, that man's actions are completely dictated

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1 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 56.

2 Bober, op. cit., p. 30.

by his environment. Since man has advanced to the position where he can largely control nature, it is not nature, but rather it is the means by which man controls nature, i. e., his technological methods, that shape his society. Those who control the means of applying this technology, the necessary machines, land and money, control society and order its destiny.[1]

(1) The Dialectic of Man and Nature

Marxist theory considers the relation between man and nature a dialectical one. Two opposing forces interact with each other. Nature is the thesis since man has evolved from nature, but there is still the eternal conflict between the two. Man can control nature to a certain extent yet he must always depend upon nature for his existence.[2] Freedom is the extent to which man becomes free from his dependence upon nature, the degree to which he can "make plans and accumulate resources." Freedom must be striven for, it is not a gift handed down from a benevolent supreme being.[3]

(2) The Dialectic of Man and His Fellow Man

Man's relationship with his fellow man is also of a dialectical nature. Every activity of man breeds its own

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1 Mackinnon, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

2 Ibid., p. 16.

3 Ibid., p. 13.

destruction. Yet it is not fruitless, for interaction with each antithesis results in an improved synthesis. Here there is the inevitable conflict. As man controls nature through technology and therefore other men, he also becomes dependent upon those whom he controls. Soon this dependence leads to an exploitation by the controlling class and conflict results.

(3) The Dialectic of Society as a Whole, The Materialistic Conception of History

Yet these processes are not merely cyclical, for as there are breakthroughs in the natural sciences so are there leaps forward in man's relationships. When the system becomes intolerable, when the controlling class must so exploit the masses in order to maintain its own standard of living, then the antithesis explodes in a revolution and a new controlling class is established.[1]

The old dies and leaves the new to propagate its own, "the negation of the negation," as Engels termed it. Again the analogy is applied. A grain of wheat is sown. In dying it negates itself but produces a plant. The plant produces grain and then dies, the negation of the negation. But there has been progress, for one grain has produced many more. In a clever mathematical demonstration he again substantiates his point. Take the quantity "a," negate it and the

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1 Mackinnon, op. cit., pp. 16f.

result is "-a," multiply it by itself, the two minuses being a negation of the negation, and one ends with a^2, the original at a higher power.[1]

The dialectic is applied to material objects, then to individual men, and finally to corporate man. Its result is the materialistic conception of history. Engels considers this as no great discovery for he states:

> . . . in nature and also up to now for the most part in human history, these laws assert themselves unconsciously in the form of external necessity in the midst of an endless series of seeming accidents. Thereby the dialectic of the concept itself became merely the conscious reflex of the dialectical motion of the real world and the dialectic of Hegel was placed upon its head; or rather, turned off its head, on which it was standing before, and placed upon its feet again.2

E. Summary

This chapter has presented the development of the philosophy of Karl Marx, the result of which, when considered in its totality is referred to as the system of dialectical materialism. When applied to society, it is known more specifically as the materialistic conception of history.[3]

The prevailing revolutionary forces and philosophies influenced Marx. Starting with no à priori other than the desire to develop an inclusive, integrated system which would in practice raise man's standard of living, he felt free to choose from his predecessors and contemporaries.

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1 Bober, op. cit., p. 33.

2 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 54.

3 Bober, op. cit., p. 45.

From these, Hegel and Feuerbach in particular, by refuting some of their basic principles and accepting others, he built his eclectic philosophy of dialectical materialism.

His system is avowedly atheistic, because as a materialist he recognizes nothing but concrete reality. Marx found evidence for his belief in the importance of material objects and the processes which they undergo in the physical and social world about him.

CHAPTER TWO

MARX'S PHILOSOPHICAL REFUTATION OF CHRISTIANITY

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A. Introduction

The ideology of Karl Marx covers a wide range of thought. At every turn Marx was determined to repudiate the thinking of any conflicting system. Christianity, being an all-inclusive ideology, confronted him constantly, and in many ways Marxism is a rebellion against Christian thought. As has been noted Marx considered "the criticism of religion the beginning of all criticism."[1]

This chapter deals with Marx's criticism of Christianity in the philosophical realm. Chapter three is concerned with criticism in the area of practice. This follows Marx's method. As noted in chapter one, his procedure was first to prove a system philosophically invalid and then to demonstrate its pragmatic weaknesses.[2]

Several areas of philosophical thought are considered and Marx's refutations are outlined. Often Marx states his position without comparing it with the Christian position. In such cases, while his position opposes that of Christianity, Marx does not explicitly make this point. In this thesis

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1 Karl Marx, quoted in Vladimar Lenin, Religion, New York, 1930, p. 3.

2 Supra, p. 12.

the Christian view is also given to emphasize the dissimilarity between the two and to develop what is an implicit refutation by Marx.

B. The Supreme Power

1. Deity or Dialectic

For Karl Marx the great power behind all existence was the power of the dialectic. He recognized the profound plan of the universe but rejected any belief in a supreme planner behind it. Any suggestion of a transcendent being was anathema to him.[1]

The supreme force behind the universe for Hegel, his "vaguely personal 'It,' the absolute spirit in history, became for Marx an utterly impersonal 'It' of material energy, a self-running engine without designer or engineer."[2] The concept of dialectic had replaced the concept of deity.

Marx acknowledged only the material and its inherent interactions. In so doing he partially sided with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which also recognizes the importance of the material as having value in and of itself and as an instrument through which the mind and spirit of man can be expressed.[3] Since, however, the basic dualism of Judaeo-

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1 Price, op. cit., p. 51.

2 Ibid.

3 Price, op. cit., p. 52.

Christian thought is between God and man, Marx considered Christianity as idealistic and anti-materialistic.

2. The Origins of Religion

a. Marx

Marx reduces any religious thought of a transcendent being to a product of man's mind. Since the mind is governed by its environment, its economic environment in particular, religion is the result of the productive forces at work in a society. M. M. Bober has summarized Marx, "Religious conceptions are pictures and ideas which people form in response to their material environment."[1]

(1) Primitive Society

In support of this theory, Marx traces the development of religion, relating it to economic environment. He begins with primitive society in which the methods of production and, therefore, the social relationships were simple. Here the contact of man with his fellow man and of man with nature were direct. Althogh secure in his social relationships, primitive man was confronted with nature, which was incomprehensible to him. He worshiped that which he could not comprehend and thus religion came into being. As Engels concurred, " Religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their

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1 Bober, op. cit., p. 147.

daily life. . . . In the beginning of history it was the forces of Nature that were so reflected."[1]

(2) Modern Society

Marx continues his analysis and examines the economic system of capitalism. Here he presents an involved theory in which an object of trade, a commodity, takes on "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[2] He continues, "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labours appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour."[3] Commodities become social entities, and social relations come to exist only among the various commodities. Since man is divorced from the sale of and from the use of his product, he cannot follow the course of it after he fashions it.

All this depersonalization tends to mystify the worker and he becomes as dominated by his system of production and exchange as primitive man was by his fear of nature. Whereas modern man comprehends the natural world which the savage could not, he does not have the direct personal relationships which his ancestors enjoyed. Modern man is equally mystified, but for a different reason.[4]

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1 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring, New York, 1939, p. 344.

2 Karl Marx, Capital, I, London, 1903, p. 41.

3 Ibid., pp. 42-43.

4 Bober, op. cit., pp. 147-148.

To preserve his well-being, man "must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world."[1] Marx perceives that Christianity with its cult of the "abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion . . . for such a society."[2] Marx does not expound his theory with regard to Protestantism and Deism but his main thought is that present-day religion is as much a product of the unknown with which man's environment confronts him as was primitive religion.

b. Engels

Engels supports Marx's refutation of a superior being by delving into the origin of religion and proving all religion to be a result of primitive thinking. He sees the concept of the soul arising out of the dream apparitions of primitive peoples. Immortality was invented in order to provide for the continuance of the soul after physical death. This concept developed into personal immortality out of expediency rather than out of a desire for eternal life; indeed, immortality was considered a misfortune by the Greeks.[3]

The first gods were the personification of natural forces. The various gods eventually became mutually exclusive in the

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1 Karl Marx, Capital, I, London, 1903, p. 43.

2 Ibid., p.51.

3 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 30.

minds of men until the concept of monotheism triumphed. Engels dismisses all religion in these terms, tracing its beginning to the mind of the savage.

3. The Consequences of Religion

a. The Degradation of Man

Marx saw the theism of his day as a remnant of primitive and medieval superstition. Man's only freedom lay in overthrowing the shackles of religion. Marx's desire was "not religious freedom of conscience but the freedom of conscience from religious superstition."[1] Bound by religious beliefs, man was enslaved to the elemental forces of nature. Religion is the expression of man's noblest good, but religion alienates man from this good by transferring this good to a transcendental spiritual being. Man becomes nothing for he is "totally depraved." Marx wrote, "It is the imaginary realization of humanity, because that humanity possesses no true reality itself."[2]

This was largely the thinking of Feuerbach but Marx analyzed the implications of such thought. When man overcomes the forces of nature and gains freedom from economic wants, when he comes to understand the seemingly irrational phenomena of the universe, fear of the unknown and fear of

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1 Karl Marx quoted in Nicolas Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism, London, 1948, p. 159.

2 Karl Marx, Gesamtausgabe, I, Berlin, 1932, p. 607, quoted in Charles West, Communism and the Theologians, London, 1958, p. 21.

the future are dispelled. Since religion is based upon fear, when fear is conquered religion is discarded as unnecessary.[1]

b. Provision of a False Hope

Marx considered religion as creating an ideal world of illusion to "provide an imaginary consolation for the inevitable frustrations of actual life." Marx states his well-known phrase, "Religion is the opium of the people."[2] It is a defense mechanism to escape from reality, "its hidden motive being to provide an illusion of freedom and community in the absence of reality."[3] Religion diverts human thinking and effort from the real struggle of this life to a hypothetical struggle in the realm of the spirit.

The proletariat, however, will not be deluded forever. Their struggle for existence is very much of this world. When the proletariat achieve a status of self-respect and economic independence, then there will be no need for "supernatural consolation or for an escape into an imaginary 'other-world.'"[4]

C. Philosophy of History

1. The Basic Issue

Marx's view of the supreme power behind the universe influenced his philosophy of history. If material objects and their interaction were sovereign, then history became

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1 Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 159.

2 Karl Marx, A Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right; Vladimar Lenin, Religion, New York, 1930, p. 7.

3 Macmurray, op. cit., p. 53.

4 Ibid., p. 31.

the interaction of man with man and man with nature. Economic progress, and the resultant social relations, produce class conflict which is the story of history.

Christianity on the other hand "gives a supreme place to God in history and over history." God is working out his purpose for the world through the lives of men. In Christian thought the relations between God and man are considered more important than the socio-economic relations among men.[1]

Marx would condemn the Christian view as stated above, yet his thinking reveals a close similarity to Judaeo-Christian thought. Marxism regards the history of civilization as "the collective decisions of men, of time and events and nations."[2] Christianity and Marxism are similar at this point when contrasted with such philosophies as Neoplatonism and Buddhism, which virtually disregard history in an "effort to escape from time and history to the changeless and the eternal."[3]

2. "The Kingdom"

Marx disparaged the belief that there was reality in anything other-worldly. He renounced the idea of a transcendent, other-worldly Kingdom of God to be ushered in by

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1 Price, op. cit., p. 63.

2 John C. Bennett, Communism and Christianity Today, New York, 1960, p. 77.

3 Ibid.

the return of Jesus Christ.[1]

Marx could only think in materialistic terms. The hopes of man had to be realized in this life since, for Marx, there was no life in the hereafter. Man's hopes could only be realized by means of a revolution in which the proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish a classless society.[2] The coming of this new age is dependent upon the actions of man. Its establishment is also in human hands, judgment will be meted out by the proletariat upon the bourgeoisie. Judgment will be on the basis of economic position and not on the basis of faith as Christianity believes.

Marx would have denounced those who placed their faith in the Social Gospel in like manner. The "Kingdom," although a reality in this age, would never be attained by love and the philanthropy of the bourgeoisie. Rather it was hate and hatred between classes which would foster the revolution and bring about the classless utopia.[3]

D. View of Man

1. The Origin of Sin

In Marx's thought man was considered to be a product of his environment. This led to regarding man as "neutral," i. e., as acted upon by outside forces and not motivated from within. Marx believed man to differ from animal life

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1 Ibid., p. 78.

2 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, New York, 1948, p. 31.

3 Price, op. cit., p. 23.

only when he was able to produce his "means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by [his] physical organization."[1] While Christianity has considered the Marxist view as degrading, Marx criticized Christianity for preaching the debasing doctrine of original sin. For Marx, original sin was only a myth which hindered man from attaining his true good. Marx reproved the Church for preaching the concept of inherent sin, especially Hegel's interpretation which deemed man merely to be matter until his consciousness is transformed by God.[2]

Only a few were so spiritually awakened and, as a result, the great majority of people never rose above the level of matter. This resulted in an inequality which justified the superiority of the "spiritual" over the "unspiritual." Marx wrote, "Christianity has known only one point in which all men were equal, that all were equally born in original sin-which corresponded perfectly with its character as the religion of the oppressed."[3] Marx notes that the enlightened bourgeoisie had risen above the "unspiritual" proletariat and were no longer plagued by the depravity of original sin.

Marx held a high view of man. Nicolas Berdyaev conjectures that he developed a peculiar trait of Russian religious thought: the concept of "God-humanity." The Russian Orthodox

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1 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, German Ideology, quoted in A Handbook of Marxism, Emile Burns, ed., London, 1935, p. 211.

2 Karl Marx, The Holy Family, quoted in Rühle, op. cit., p. 84.

3 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring, New York, 1939, p. 114.

Church had stated, "As in Jesus Christ, the God-man, there occurred an individual incarnation of God in man, so similarly in humanity there should occur a collective incarnation of God."[1]

Marx deleted the thought of a transcendent God by considering "God" to be the highest nature of man. Instead of man naively worshiping Jesus Christ, a myth which embodied man's highest ideals, man should endeavor to attain these ideals in his own life and society.

2. The Transforming of Man

Refusing to admit that evil was inherent in man and convinced that man was a product of his society, Marx saw all evil as a result of the socio-economic system under which he lived. All evil could be traced to the sin of private ownership and thus the evil of the modern world is a result of the economic system of capitalism. When the system of socialism becomes universally established, then evil will be permanently banished.[2]

Marx dismissed the teachings of Christ which stressed the need for personal change and the reformation of society through individuals. This method of transforming society was hopelessly utopian. Marx referred to Christ as an "amateur" in the field of revolution.

Marx claimed that Christianity, in its eighteen cen-

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1 Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 180.

2 Shaull, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

turies of existence, had failed to improve the world. A drastic new principle was called for, one in accord with the dialectic of history, one which dealt with the systems which controlled man and not with individual man. Marx could not await, nor should the disillusioned proletariat be made to await, the mystical, spiritual kingdom of which Christ had preached.[1]

E. Ethics

1. The Source of Ethics

Marxist thought confronted the Christian doctrine that an absolute ethic was revealed in Scripture. The Church asserted that ethical standards have a metaphysical reality, a value transcending the physical and experiential. Marx retorted that morals are but the product of class-conditioned minds. Neither men nor their ideas can detach themselves from the society of which they are a part.[2]

Resorting to his basic thesis that society is governed by the economic relations within it, Marx felt that "moral ideas are but the by-product of class interests; moral behavior is conditioned by the prevailing economic and products-exchange system."[3]

Marx presents slavery as an example. Slavery was not

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1 Price, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

2 Ibid., p. 81.

3 Ibid.

considered wrong by either the Greeks or the cotton planters of the southern United States, since slavery arose as the natural "consequences [of their] conditions of production." The capitalistic society condemns slavery only because its economic system is incompatible with slavery. Thus "slavery on the basis of capitalistic production is unjust."[1]

2. Marx's Relative Ethic

Marx denied belief in an absolute ethic. If moral values are a result of the ruling class and its econonic system, when one class displaces another as the ruling class, a new code of ethics comes into being. Marx stated, "When a subject class overpowers its rival, what was good no longer is good, and what was regarded as wrong in the past may become right."[2]

Engels writes disparagingly of those who acknowledge eternal truths, valid for all ages. Although he does not mention Christ by name, reference to him is implied. Engels states that a "friend of humanity," "the newly arisen prophet," often appears in history claiming to have a universal ethical system. Engels would refute such a claim, asserting that all moral codes are similar in that they are limited by the environment of their originator.[3]

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1 Bober, op. cit., pp. 141-142.

2 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring, New York, 1939, pp. 99-100, 106-107, quoted in Bober, op. cit., p. 146.

3 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring, New York, 1939, p. 103, quoted in Bober, op. cit., p. 145.

Marx's explanation was that only when class evolution has reached its final stage, that of classless socialism, can a universal, absolute ethic be a reality.[1]

3. Marx's Determination of Right

Until this goal is reached, Marx advocated that the principles and actions that would most readily attain this goal were morally right. Moral good is judged by its "harmony with or opposition to historical necessity" as prescribed by the materialistic conception of history.[2] Lenin confirming Marx wrote,"A morality taken from outside of human society does not exist for us; it is a fraud. For us, morality is subordinated to the interests of the workers' class struggle."[3]

The Marxist ethic is not an absolute ethic. Depending upon the situation, depending upon the phase in which the evolution toward a classless society is at the moment, the right may vary. Lenin proclaimed, "It is necessary to use any ruse, cunning, unlawful method, evasion, concealment of truth."[4]

Marx stands for what Christianity would deem a valid morality. Throughout his writings he denounces exploitation,

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1 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring, New York, 1939, pp. 103-104, quoted in Bober, op. cit., p. 146.

2 Price, op. cit., p. 82.

3 Vladimar Lenin, "Address to the Third All-Russian Congress of the Young Communist League," 1920, quoted in Vladimar Lenin, Religion, New York, 1930, p. 46.

4 Vladimar Lenin, Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, London, 1934, quoted in Price, op. cit., p. 83.

greed, and injustice, the degradation of the laboring masses, the distortion of values in capitalistic society.[1] Yet in approving of any means to alleviate these conditions, and in forsaking the Christian means of forgiveness and love for retribution and hate, he contradicts the Christian ethic. In many ways the ends are similar, but the means are poles apart.

F. Summary

Marx realized the threat that Christian philosophy posed to his ideology. He considered it necessary to refute several of Christianity's principal doctrines.

He challenged the Christian belief in the power of a divine Supreme Being by declaring dialectical materialism to be the power behind history. In support of his claim, he traced the origin of religion back to the mind of primitive man. The only purpose of religion for Marx was to help man confront the fear of the unknown and to supply an explanation of life after death.

Marxist thinking parallels Christian thought in believing that a state of ideal conditions will one day be realized. For Marx this state had to be an earthly reality; he disparaged the Christian belief in a future heavenly life.

Marx viewed man as a product of his society As a result, sin was not inherent in man but rather the result of the system under which man lived. In order for man's lot

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1 Bober, op. cit., p. 146.

to be improved in any way, the system which governed him had to be improved. Man could not be transformed individually as Christianity maintained.

In the realm of ethics, Marx taught that the highest good was that which accomplished the purposes of the revolution toward establishing a classless society. His is a relative ethic until this goal is reached. In the classless society, however, that which is for the good of all will automatically become absolute and universal.

CHAPTER THREE

MARX'S PRACTICAL REFUTATION OF CHRISTIANITY

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A. Introduction

Having refuted Christianity on a philosophical level, Marx now turned to the practical side of the question. Had Christianity had an impact upon the world; what changes for the better had it wrought? For Marx a system had to be capable of bettering man's lot in life; speculative theorizing was not enough. He succinctly stated this conviction in his criticism of Feuerbach, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it."[1]

This chapter will trace Marx's historical analysis of Christianity. His criticisms, amplified by Engels, are his refutation of Christianity's moral ethic.

B. The History of Christianity

1. The Birth of Christianity

Marx noticed that the origin of Christianity occurred during the period of Roman conquest, a period in which the plight of the masses was at its worst. "The indebted farmer, the lowly freeman, the slave, and the nationalities sub-

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1 Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, an appendix in Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 75.

jected by defeat" knew nothing but misery and poverty. Christianity flourished among these downtrodden by stressing an afterlife in which the just would realize blessing and the wicked would suffer for their earthly sins.[1]

Then Marx notes that Christianity underwent a unique transition. Having started as a movement of the disinherited and having grown because of suffering persecution, it suddenly became the religion of the ruling class. Instead of being "stamped out" by the aristocracy it was adopted by them. This phenomenon, Marx contends, resulted from a recognition by the ruling class that Christianity could serve as an asset in establishing the "kingdom of Caesar."[2]

Engels develops this hypocritical turn of Christianity. It was evidence for him that the early principles of common ownership and equality had been the result of circumstances rather than the result of equalitarian ideals. Engels remarked, "Within a very short time the establishment of the distinction between priests and laymen put an end even to this tendency to Christian equality."[3]

The bishops and priests of the Church became allied with the interests of the emperor and the aristocracy, even

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1 Bober, op. cit., p. 150.

2 Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 171.

3 Friedrich Engels, Anti-Dühring, New York, 1939, p. 114.

to the extent of engaging "in the slavery of the Roman empire for centuries."[1]

2. The Medieval Period

Engels cites that the Church gradually became the largest landholder in medieval Europe. While in former times feudal lords had confiscated the land of the serf, now the Church continued the practice.[2] In parts of Germany the priests originated the practice of enabling the "honest German to bequeath his property to the Church without any interference."[3]

Marx and Engels view the Church during the Middle Ages as a land-hungry institution, preaching heaven but striving to possess as much of the earth as possible.[4]

The Church became the power of medieval times, controlling the political system by granting favors to those monarchs who looked to the Church for the assurance of their divine right to rule. The Church of Rome ruled every area of life. Science was shackled by the proclamation of the Church ; philosophy, politics, and juris-

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1 Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Chicago, 1902, p. 181.

2 Ibid., p. 186.

3 Ibid., p. 215.

4 Bober, op. cit., p. 152.

prudence "were saturated with theology and subordinated to its authority."[1]

3. The German Reformation

Marx discusses at greater length the situations which brought about Protestantism. In order to establish themselves, the rising bourgeoisie had to do away with the institutions of the old order. As the monarchies and the feudal system had been toppled, so must be the Church of Rome. Engels considers the first sign of a "Protestant heresy" to have been evidenced by a group of "urban trading bourgeoisie" and artisans in Alii, Southern France. This movement, protesting exploitation by the Roman Catholic Church, was summarily crushed by an army of the pope.[2]

The first major opposition to the old order, however, was the German Reformation under Luther. The bourgeoisie, anxious to overthrow the Church, realized that they needed the strength of the proletariat to accomplish their goal. "To the masses whose minds were fed with religion to the exclusion of all else, it was necessary to put forward their own [the bourgeoisie] interests in a religious guise in order to produce a great agitation." The bourgeoisie strength-

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1 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 66.

2 Ibid.

ened themselves until the balance of power between their forces and the alliance of the feudal nobility and the Roman Church reached "national dimensions."[1]

When the revolution did come, the bourgeoisie could not unite their forces, i.e., "the plebians of the towns, the lower nobility and the peasants on the land." In the early stages, the nobility were defeated, but as the peasants rose in revolt, "the cities left them in the lurch, and thus the revolution succumbed to the armies of the secular princes who reaped the whole profit." The power of Rome had been broken but had fallen to the landed aristocracy. Engels considers this to be the cause of Germany's demise, disappearing "for three centuries from the ranks of countries playing an independent part in history."[2]

Marx sums up the results of this phase of the Reformation by noting, "The process of forcible expropriation of the people received in the 16th century a new and frightful impulse from the Reformation."[3] Marx reasons that when the Church lost her property, her authority as well was lost. The bourgeoisie realized few immediate advantages as the power lost by the Church had been gained by

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Karl Marx, Capital, I, London, 1903, p. 744.

the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie, however, had become a power to be reckoned with and the balance of power was soon to shift.

4. Calvinism

In the middle of the sixteenth century John Calvin entered upon the scene. His great accomplishment was to justify the actions of the bourgeoisie. As the Church and monarchies had looked to God for their authority to control the masses, now the bourgeoisie could also claim God's blessings upon their actions. Calvin preached that industry and thrift were honoring to God. The economic success which usually resulted form these virtues was considered a sign of God's blessing. Calvin also justified the lending of money at a prescribed interest rate. These elements combined to foster the capitalistic system which the bourgeoisie eventually employed to reap great financial gains.[1]

Marx fills page after page in his first volume of Capital with the atrocities of European and English capitalism. He cites the Church's support of such capitalistic exploitation. Marx's quote of J. Townsend, a Church of England parson, is typical:

> It seems to be a law of nature that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident that there may always be some to fulfil the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community, The stock

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1 Bober, op. cit., p. 153.

> of human happiness is thereby much increased, whilst the more delicate are not only relieved from drudgery . . . but are left at liberty without interruption to pursue those callings which are suited to their various dispositions. Any attempt to alleviate the poverty of the poor tends to destroy the harmony and beauty, the symmetry and order of that system which God and nature have established in the world.[1]

Engels considers Calvin to have given the Reformation a true "bourgeois character" as evidenced in the flourishing cities of Switzerland and Holland. Then Calvinism "provided the ideological costume for the second act of the bourgeois revolution which took place in England."[2] Calvinism became influential in 1689 due to a "compromise between one part of the nobility and the bourgeois." The aristocracy, which had acquired the land after the demise of the Church, were displaced during the Glorious Revolution which brought to power William of Orange and the "landlord and capitalistic appropriations of surplus-value."[3] The English state church was re-established, not in its earlier form of Catholicism but in a strongly Calvinistic form. The stage was set for capitalism in England.

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1 J. Townsend, "A Dissertation on the Poor Law," 1786, quoted in Karl Marx, Capital, I, London, 1903, p. 662.

2 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 66.

3 Karl Marx, Capital, I, London, 1903, pp. 745-747.

5. The End of Christian Revolutionary Influence

By the time of the French Revolution, Engels believes that Christianity had lost its power as a vital force. The "free-thinking" of Voltaire and the blunders of Louis XVI no longer made religion a needed force to inspire revolution. Engels considers the French Revolution to be devoid of religious convictions and purely political. He writes, "Christianity could no longer serve the progressive class as the ideological garb of its aspirations."[1]

From the time of the French Revolution, Christianity becomes the "exclusive possession of the ruling class." Engels sees this class as utilizing religion "merely as a form of government" to control the lower classes. In conclusion, he states, "For each of the different classes uses its own appropriate religion; the landowning class - Catholic Jesuitism or Protestant orthodoxy; the liberal and radical bourgeoisie - rationalism; and it makes little difference whether these gentlemen themselves believe in their respective religions or not."[2]

C. Marx's Conclusions

1. The Relation of Christian Practice to Christian Thought

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1 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, 1941, p. 66.

2 Ibid.

Marx perceived the evils of Christian practice to be a result of Christian philosophy. The ideological alienation of man's intellectual and moral qualities by means of religion conveniently correspond to the physical alienation of man's material goods. "The wealth, which as it were a crystallization of the toil and sweat of the workers, is alienated from them by their exploiters and used to rivet their chains."[1]

2. Marx's Condemnation

Marx totally condemned the Christian Church and the bourgeois system to which he felt it had become subservient. He considered the bourgeoisie who rationalized that they had God-given rights to wealth and power as hypocritical as those who acclaimed religion for the masses but totally ignored it themselves.

Those whose conscience still demanded an obedience to God justified their exploitation of the masses by drawing inferences from the doctrine of original sin to explain the existence of injustice. The Church readily agreed that suffering and trial were helpful for the salvation of the soul and that humility consisted of submission to the existing order.[2]

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1 Mackinnon, op. cit., p. 17.

2 Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 172.

But most of the bourgeoisie were not so "conscientious," for the majority had abandoned religion. This concurred with Marx's theory that religion is a result of fear and mystery. The bourgeoisie were now educated, rich and free; they had no need of God. The only need of religion now was to pacify the poor with their state in life.[1] This would ensure the good fortune of the bourgeoisie. Marx wrote, "The mortgage the peasant has on heavenly goods gives guaranty to the mortgage the bourgeoisie has on the peasant's earthly goods."[2]

Marx felt that the Church could be relied upon to support the bourgeoisie. She had always done so in the past. The Church had "justified the slavery of classical days; . . . glorified medieval serfdom; . . . is able when needed to defend the oppression of the proletariat, though with a somewhat crestfallen air."[3]

D. Summary

Marx condemned the social ethic of Christianity by analyzing the history of the Christian Church from its origin to the nineteenth century capitalistic era. He lays

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1 Ibid., p. 159.

2 Karl Marx, The Class Struggles in France, New York, 1934, p. 64, quoted in Bober, op. cit., p. 156.

3 Karl Marx, Gesamtausgabe, Berlin, 1933, op. cit., p. 88.

bare the corruption which had so often been at the roots of the Church.

In conclusion, Marx regards the Church as nothing more than an institution designed to benefit the privileged and to exploit the poor. The doctrines of the Church had been interpreted to accomplish this end. Material interests transcended principle. Marx wrote, "The English Established Church . . . will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on 1/39 of its income."[1] Marx considers the Church as he does any other institution, a product of its times, governed in essence by economic necessity and greed.

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1 Karl Marx, Capital, I, London, 1903, p. xix.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CRITIQUE OF MARXISM BY CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS

CHAPTER FOUR

A CRITIQUE OF MARXISM BY CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS

A. Introduction

Marx's thinking has had an impact upon every area of thought, and certainly theology has not escaped its influence. Most of today's theologians have expressed their views of the Marxist system.

This chapter will summarily present the thinking of three theologians, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Reinhold Niebuhr, on Marxist socialism. Marxist socialism is not to be equated with Marx's original thinking nor with the hardened form of his thought as represented in Russian Communism. Under consideration here is the Marxist socialism that was prevalent during the inter-war period of this century. Since Marx is recognized as the father of all socialism, a comment on socialism is relevant to this research.[1]

These theologians have gone beyond the superficial arguments which much of the Christian world has relied upon when encountering Communism. The popular Christian attitude has been one of comparing the two systems and rejecting Communism because of its atheistic thought and un-

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1 "Karl Marx," Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 18, 1957, p. 345.

just practice while upholding the entire "Christian" Free World. This approach to the problem is not an honest confrontation but rather a refusal to understand Communism and the issues it raises.

B. Paul Tillich

The theology of Tillich is influenced by his philosophical considerations. As a philosopher, he is concerned with the overall philosophy of Marxism and the historical context in which it originated and is currently functioning.[1]

Tillich's thought is a product of the political crises which he experienced between the two world wars. Confronted by the socialism of Germany and Europe, in the nineteen-thirties he became deeply involved in the socialist movement. While perceiving the shortcomings of socialism, he favored much of what they were attempting to accomplish. During this period he believed that the Christian position should be one of "participation in the Marxist-socialist movement, to basic common action and conversation with the Marxists."[2] Tillich felt that a Christian force within the socialist movement would enable socialism to "resolve its inner conflicts and deepen its religious per-

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1 Charles West, Communism and the Theologians, London, 1958, p. 78.

2 Ibid., p. 96.

spectives."[1]

1. Historical Analysis

Tillich approaches the influence of Marxism from the historical standpoint. While the event of the coming of Christ stands at the center of Christian history, history subsequent to this event is also of utmost importance. For Tillich, history moves "between the poles of theonomy and autonomy." A "theonomous period of history" he describes as the meeting of "a crisis of history, a period of expectation," by "the power of a new creation for which the time is ripe." Also in such a period the Origin ("the substance of Being which must be fulfilled and not denied") is fulfilled by the Unconditional Demand ("the Demand for justice") according to the standard and measure of the "New Being in Christ."[2] The alternative or autonomous period, asserts that human freedom and creativity are able to realize the Unconditional Demand within human existence and by rational means.[3]

a. The Present Era

Tillich considered the historical situation of the nineteen-thirties to be one of "autonomous humanism," brought about by the bourgeois capitalistic order. The

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1 Ibid., p. 107.

2 Ibid., pp. 79-82.

3 Ibid.

"self-sufficient finitude" and "autonomous this-worldliness" of capitalism had destroyed the sanctity of the relationship between man and his world. Man had lost control over his existence. Tillich here quotes Marx, "Nature and society are made into mere things."[1]

b. Understanding the Present Situation

For Tillich, Protestant Christianity contains the resources necessary to understand this period of autonomy. The situation must be considered in light of Protestant Christian precepts. This latter, Protestant Christianity, is then "the point of view," while the former, the situation of a bourgeois capitalistic system and the antagonisms between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie which it has engendered, is the "point in existence."[2] Both of these elements must be taken into account. While Christianity is indispensable as the point of view, Tillich also considers Marxist socialism most significant in understanding the point in existence. He writes, "Nobody can understand the character of the present world revolution who has not been prepared for it by the Marxist analysis of bourgeois society, its contradictions and its decisive trends."[3]

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1 Ibid., p. 89.

2 Ibid., p. 90.

3 Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era, Chicago, 1948, p. 260.

2. Attitude Toward Marxism

Considering both Christianity and Marxism as uniquely valid for historical analysis, Tillich compares the two philosophies. He considers the two ideologies as complementary but he also views them as paralleling each other.

a. Parallels

Tillich cites three such parallels or common concerns between Christianity and Marxist socialism:[1]

1.) The common concern for a unity of theory and practice.

As with Marx, Tillich does not divorce the two. "Religious truth is existential truth, and to that extent it cannot be separated from practice. Religious truth is acted. . ."[2]

2.) The parallel between the Christian and Marxist views of history.

Tillich believes that Marx, although he denounced any idea of other-worldliness, still expressed an "eschatological as well as this-worldly" hope in his desire for a classless society. He considers the this-worldly and the other-worldly in Marxism to be in creative tension, denoting the essence of human hope.

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1 West, op. cit., pp. 91-96.

2 Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History, New York, 1936, p. 18.

3.) The doctrine of man.

Tillich agrees with Marx that man cannot be considered only as an individual but must be reckoned with in terms of his society. He affirms that Marx's thought did not reduce man to a product of his material environment. Tillich states, "To call him materialistic in the moral sense is a sign either of ignorance or propagandist dishonesty."[1] Tillich maintains that Marx emphasized an intimate association of spirit and body and held a high regard for man.

In these three areas, Tillich considers Marxist thought to have proved itself to be a valid prognostication and analysis of the bourgeoisie-proletariat class struggle. Until the end of the nineteen-thirties, Tillich considered the essence of Marxist socialism to be the fact that socialism explained the present automous order and also rightly pictured the proletariat to be on the brink of ushering in a new theonomy.[2]

b. Regard for Marx

Tillich's views have changed since the Second World War but even at the end of the war he hoped for an exchange of ideas between Russia and the West. In 1948, however,

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1 Paul Tillich, "How Much Truth is There in Karl Marx?" The Christian Century, vol. LXV, September 8, 1948, p. 906.

2 West, op. cit., p. 96.

he admitted that there was no possibility of "a religious spirit penetrating East and West."[1]

The hardening of Marx's thought has not lessened Tillich's high regard for Karl Marx. Walter Dirks, a German Roman Catholic, shares this high regard with Tillich. He has written that in identifying himself with the proletariat, Marx performed an act of love, "an act which is profoundly related to an essential Christian act: an act of solidarity with the other, with the neighbour, a sacrifice." He notes that no Christian philosopher of the nineteenth century "set Marx an example in this way toward his neighbour."[2]

In 1948, Tillich wrote, "Marx is not Marxism and Marxism is not Stalinism. Only dishonest propaganda can identify them. We must approach Marx as he is, free from the connotations that have distorted his picture. Thus we shall find truth in him - scientific truth, situational truth, ultimate truth."[3]

C. Karl Barth

Barth's main emphasis has been theological. He re-

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1 Ibid., p. 109.

2 Walter Dirks, "Marxism in Christlicher Sicht," Die Frankfurter Hefte, quoted in West, op. cit., pp. 105f.

3 Paul Tillich, "How Much Truth is There in Karl Marx?" The Christian Century, vol. LXV, September 8, 1948, p. 906.

gards socialism not so much as a social issue but as one of faith and philosophy. His primary concern is the crisis of man confronted by God.[1]

1. Objections to Socialism

Barth's main objection to socialism is that it could easily become a means of "secularizing Christ by hyphenating our faith." He considered Tillich to be in the position of equating man's hope with his human effort to achieve a just society and of equating God's acts with his own program and efforts.

In dealing with social questions, Barth attempts to remain independent of any movement which would be "a man-centered construct," and which could hinder the "free movement of the Word of God to man."[2]

Certainly the bourgeois system was guilty of this. In elevating their class over the proletariat, they were claiming to have absolute authority, they were rebelling against God. This rebellion against God Barth considers to be the real issue, transcending the oppression of man by man.

Marx, from his limited atheistic position, of course could not recognize sin against God but only wrongs done to man. He, himself, is guilty of the same evil as the

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1 West, op. cit., p. 179.

2 Ibid.

bourgeoisie. The Marxist revolution considers only the proletariat as the "subject of freedom." He claims to have the absolute right. Marxist rule therefore becomes as tyrannical as that which it has replaced. Barth writes, "Far more than the conservative, the revolutionary is overcome of evil because with his 'No' he stands so strangely near to God."[1]

Barth would warn all in the seat of power and all those ambitious to gain such power:

> Must not the existing order, the order that has already been found, seem the very incarnation of triumphant unrighteousness to the man who is seeking after God and His Order? Is not the existing order a reinforcement of men against God, . . . a conspiracy of the Many - far too many - against One who manifests Himself, and can only manifest Himself, when the mature wisdom and authority of the Many crumbles in pieces?[2]

2. The Christian Perspective

a. The True Revolution

Barth calls Christians to participate in the revolution, his revolution, the revolution of "Christ the victor."[3] This revolution demands that Christians not revolt against the existing secular authority with their own revolutionary

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1 Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, London, 1933, p. 480.

2 Ibid., p. 478.

3 Ibid.

hope and power." This action should rather be one of restraint, "a negative obedience." Such subjection to the prevailing powers becomes a real act of revolution, "precisely because it is a pure act of obedience to God and not to those powers."[1] This is Barth's interpretation of Romans 12:31-13:1a, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers."

When this has been practiced faithfully, when the claims of the status quo have been undermined without a "human counter-claim," then will come the time for a "calm consideration of right and wrong." Then the parties involved will no longer feel required to make final assertions and hurl final accusations. Neither side will be overcome by the pride of having to make war for the cause of Good against Evil.[2]

b. A Continual Revolution

Thus Barth considers Marxist socialism as any other absolute system, a cause to which the Christian cannot give his allegiance. The Christian should continually support that which is a counter-force to the existing authority. But this must not be blind support, for all such reforms are relative themselves and are prone to cor-

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1 West, op. cit., p. 181.

2 Barth, op. cit., p. 489.

ruption. Barth writes, "The Christian congregation can and must indeed advocate this or that form of social progress, . . . always the most helpful form in a particular situation at a particular place and time."[1]

3. Common Concerns

Barth deals with many of the same issues that concerned Marx. Both encountered German idealism with its moral self-justification as set forth by Hegel (in Marx's case) and by Schleiermacher (in Barth's case). Both noted the despair of those who react against such idealism and the complacency of those who subscribe to it.

Barth attempts to give theological answers to these problems as Marx attempted to give philosophical answers. For Barth the starting point is the Word of God, for Marx it was dialectical materialism. In each case this reality calls men to action and total allegiance. This alone can be considered the absolute, that to which all else is relative.[2]

D. Reinhold Niebuhr

Niebuhr's chief concern has always been "the social relations in which he stands." He has disparaged any movement or thought system which would over-simplify or

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1 Karl Barth, Dogmatics, Vol. III, No. 4, Munich, 1932ff., p. 626, quoted in West, op. cit., p. 188.

2 West, op. cit., p. 189.

rationalize the practical social issues facing mankind.[1]

His theology has arisen from a search for answers to social problems. It is an attempt to bridge the gap between secular authority, which is so often sinful, and God's love. Niebuhr is looking for practical answers and thus looks at Marxism from a pragmatic viewpoint and somewhat apart from its overall philosophy. Rejecting Marxism as a theory of history, his interest centers in man's immediate struggle "with the social powers and responsibilities before [him]."

In finding a solution, the ethic of love has dominated Niebuhr's thinking. Love is paramount as it is the means of acquiring empathy with others to the extent of forsaking one's own interests and life if necessary.[2]

1. The Inadequacy of the Social Gospel

Niebuhr looked to the social gospel to find an expression of such love and empathy. He ultimately rejected this school, however, believing that while reason and conscience make one aware of the wants of others and of one's duty toward them, in the final analysis they are inadequate. Niebuhr notes, "There is no miracle by which men can achieve a rationality high enough to give them as vivid an under-

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1 West, op. cit., pp. 117-119.

2 Ibid.

standing of general interests as of their own."[1]

Thus a Christianity based only on reason must degenerate into moral irrelevancy and so Niebuhr feels, liberalism has done. Such a religion becomes a subscriber to the desires of the ruling group. Reason transcends love and the religious conscience becomes dulled to the point that "no sound principle of political change emerges anywhere in [its] thought."[2]

2. The Inadequacy of Marxism

Niebuhr looked to the expression of Marxism in America and found a movement whose ideology expressed a more "nearly moral" cause than any other movement. Yet in practical experience he found socialists untrustworthy in working toward common goals and uninterested in the common welfare of all.

a. Irrelevant

Marxism in reality came to reveal itself as irrelevant when dealing with the problems of society. With its authoritativeness it denied justice and freedom. It became an "ideological illusion which hindered relevant action."[3]

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1 Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, London, 1933, p. 45., quoted in West, op. cit., p. 121.

2 Reinhold Niebuhr, Reflections on the End of an Era, New York, 1936, p. 221.

3 West, op. cit., p. 124.

b. A Limited Religion

Niebuhr attempted to oppose the idealism of socialism and its belief in the perfect society. He analyzed Marxism and considered it to be another religion. To Niebuhr Marxism was "religious" in nature because of its eschatological hope for a future utopia integrated with a pessimism of the present and because of its concrete authority which claimed to be the final word in thought and action.[1]

Niebuhr believes that when Marxism is considered as a religion, its shortcomings are obvious. It is a "low" religion. By this Niebuhr means that it is not "dualistic." It presents no concept of transcendence and destiny for the individual. It is bound to this world and shares, with many other corrupted religions, the danger of associating a relative earthly good with the absolute good.[2]

In its utopian dream, socialism places faith in the innocence of human nature, the same mistake which the proponents of the social gospel were guilty of. In addition, Marxism can see only the struggle and victory of one class, the proletariat. Under Marxist rule, the party and the state reign supreme and become sanctified. There is no transcendent object to worship and these powers become worshiped and omnipotent.

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1 Ibid., p. 133.

2 Ibid.

3. A Synthesis

Niebuhr recognizes the strong points of both Marxism and Christianity. Certainly Marx had developed a valid interpretation of the social situation. His view of history as social conflict and evolution is, for Niebuhr, an expression of God's judgment upon history.[1]

Christianity needs to learn from the Marxist view of history. The judgment of God in the past must warn Christianity to guard against "the constant tendency of the Church to identify the status quo with the Kingdom of God." Then Christianity will be a truly prophetic religion which "does not claim to reach an absolutely pure judgment itself" and which has a "capacity for judging all relative and partial values."[2]

But Christianity brings to the situation elements which Marxism cannot. It contributes the concept of transcendence, a belief that life is not wholly this-worldly but that a realm of the spirit also exists.

Then, too, it brings the all important law of love, that which is a requisite for making one sensitive to the "higher possibilities in the affirmation of human personality in lives other than our own."[3] The individual will

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1 Ibid., pp. 125f.

2 Reinhold Niebuhr, "Is Religion Counter-Revolutionary?" Radical Religion, vol. I, Autumn, 1935, pp. 14-20, quoted in West, op. cit., p. 139.

3 West, op. cit., p. 134.

be considered for what he is, apart from dehumanizing collectivism. With love come the elements of repentance and forgiveness. When man is open to the judgment of his fellow man, he repents and finds the forgiveness of God "which makes the tension of this everlasting moral struggle tolerable."[1]

E. Summary

This chapter has summarized the thinking of three of today's most prominent theologians towards Marxist socialism. Each regards this philosophy from a different point of view and each recognizes different strengths and weaknesses within the system.

Paul Tillich approaches Marxism from a philosophical aspect. He values the analysis of history which Marxism presents and asserts that the present social and political world revolutions cannot be understood apart from the Marxist analysis. While he rejects the narrowness of Marx's thought in its this-worldliness, he believes that Marx had deep insights into the transcendent and eternal. Broadly speaking, Tillich has little but praise for Marx's original thought. He envisioned a sharing between socialism and Christianity until the postwar period. Now he considers the Russian corruption of Marxism to have negated such a possibility.

Karl Barth considers the theological consequences of Marxism. His main concern is the futility of man's efforts

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1 Ibid.

unless granted the grace of God. Thus any system of authority which is not obedient to God's commands and which does not remain open to His judgment is doomed to failure. In essence, it is rebellion against God. On this premise he disparages not only Marxist socialism but every attempt of absolute rule whether it be corrupted Christianity or Russian Communism.

Reinhold Niebuhr speaks from his contemporary social situation. Marxism is considered pragmatically; relevance is the central criterion. By this standard he deems Marxism as he has encountered it in socialist movements as unconcerned and untrustworthy. Concerned only with a proletariat victory and a utopian classless society, Marxist socialists disregard other social classes. Tied to a dogmatic system, they cannot enter into cooperative efforts. Finally, Niebuhr realizes that Marxists know nothing of God's law of love, that which alone can give man sensitivity and concern for his neighbor.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this research to analyze Karl Marx's refutation of Christianity. The first chapter has presented a background to the study by noting the factors which influenced Marx's thought: discoveries in the natural sciences, social phenomena and prevalent philosophical ideas. The development of Marx's thinking has been traced, especially with regard to his incorporation of certain principles from the philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach to formulate the system of dialectical materialism.

Chapters two and three have dealt with Marx's refutation of Christianity. The former considers Marx's philosophical argument against Christian doctrine. Marx's chief theses were: the denial of any supreme being or other-worldly kingdom, a protest against the belief that man can be morally transformed by spiritual forces, and the rejection of an absolute moral ethic.

Marx's refutation of Christianity on the basis of its failures in the realm of practice has been treated in chapter three. Marx analyzes the history of the Christian Church and concludes that its chief concern has been to benefit the privileged classes by subjugating the masses. In keeping with his theory of dialectical materialism, Marx considers the Church as an institution similar to all others, a product of its environment.

The concluding chapter has briefly presented the thinking of theologians Paul Tillich, Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr regarding Marxist socialism. Tillich regards socialism as providing a valid historical background with which to analyze the current world situation. He credits Marx with having a keen insight into the transcendent and eternal even though Marx presented his thinking in atheistic terms.

Barth perceives Marxist socialism as an absolute system and thus, like all such systems, he considers it a rebellion against God. Every system of authority must realize God's claim of obedience, His eternal judgment and the need of His grace.

Viewing socialism from a pragmatic standpoint, Niebuhr believes this movement to be irrelevant to current social problems. Selfish and dogmatic in nature, Marxists cannot perceive the broader horizons of a concern for all men. By denying God's law of love, they are unable to empathize with those of other persuasions.

In conclusion, it is realized that the strength of the Marxist system is formidable. The keen mind which formulated it is evident at every turn. Marx's dedication is an inspiration to all, opponent as well as proponent.

Marx's philosopical attack of Christian doctrine is forceful, but it includes few insights that other anti-Christian philosophies do not. When, however, this philosophical attack is coupled with an assertion that the Church

is the epitome of hypocrisy and that Christianity is impractical as a social force, the result is provoking. Christianity must heed the challenge of both charges. Christians must become informed of Marxist ideology. Study should be made of those theologians who have struggled with the true issues that Marxist socialism presents. The black and white, theistic-atheistic argument is no longer valid.

In the area of practice, the Church must maintain an ethical position in keeping with the sacrificial life manifested by Jesus Christ. Works, especially those of a material nature, are important. It has been said that bread for oneself is a material matter; bread for one's neighbor is a spiritual matter. Christianity has been prone to neglect this aspect of the spiritual life. Does a Christian consider his material goods any differently then the Marxist? Indeed, is he as conscientious of sharing them as the Marxist is? History has revealed the Marxist as having the greater concern.

The Free World and the Church are coming to realize the seriousness of Marx's indictments. They have been goaded to action by an atheistic force. Will they sacrifically meet the challenge or will they be conquered by it? These appear to be the only alternatives.

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