

# An Inconclusive Dialogue

By Edmund Demaitre

**E**ight years have now passed since the publication of the papal encyclical *Pacem in terris*, which paved the way for a Christian-Marxist dialogue aimed at bringing about at least a limited rapprochement between the two conflicting world-views. Occasional attempts to establish contact between Christian, particularly Protestant, theologians and Marxist theoreticians had been made earlier; but it was only after the publication of Pope John XXIII's last encyclical and the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council in 1963 that the dialogue acquired a wider scope and became an important element in efforts to reduce the intensity of ideological confrontations in a dangerously fragmented world.<sup>1</sup>

To draw the balance sheet of the dialogue would be premature at this juncture; however, the exchanges of views that have taken place in the last few years have already revealed the complexity of the issues around which the respective positions of Christians and Marxists have crystallized. While no final conclusions have been reached on how to eliminate the traditional antagonism between Christians and Marxists, the theoretical premises on which any eventual rapprochement would have to rest have already been outlined by both sides within the framework of their respective metaphysical, ethical, and other commitments.

In assessing the nature of the difficulties which the participants in the dialogue face, one should first consider the overall rationale behind the attempts to bridge the chasm between a religion based on transcendence and revelation and a "secular faith" resting on a monistic-materialistic interpretation of the

world. For quite a long time, it seemed to both Christians and Marxists that any effort to bring about a rapprochement between the two conflicting world-views would be doomed to failure. The excommunication of Communists from the Catholic Church and the intolerant atheism of the various Communist regimes provided dramatic evidence of the intensity of the conflict and the involvement of political as well as ideological issues. But the situation changed quite radically in the mid-1950's, when many non-Communists and Communists alike became convinced that as a result of military-technological developments, no fundamental change in the existing political status quo could be expected in the foreseeable future. The process of international stabilization that began around that time inevitably generated new perspectives as various Christian and Marxist thinkers set out to reconsider the facts of life in the nuclear era.

Those facts were too obvious to be ignored. Christians had to take into account that about one-third of the world's population, including millions of Christians, had come under Communist rule. Communists, on the other hand, had to realize that it would be impossible to consolidate Communist power in the preponderantly Christian countries of Eastern Europe without involving Christians in "the building of socialism." Moreover, since the possibility of immediate Communist takeovers in at least Western Europe had vanished, Communists were forced

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<sup>1</sup> Without explicitly invalidating previous papal pronouncements on socialism and communism in the encyclicals *Syllabus errorum* (Pius IX, 1864), *Rerum novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891), and *Divini redemptoris* (Pius XI, 1937), Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* clearly distinguished between "false philosophical doctrines on the nature, the origin and the destiny of the universe" and "historic movements having economic, social, cultural and political aims." According to the encyclical, such movements may contain positive elements worthy of merit insofar as they conform "to the dictates of proper reason and serve as interpreters of the just aspirations of the human person."

to recognize that bids for power there—especially in those countries (like France and Italy) where local parties had become an important factor in national politics—would have to take place within the framework of existing political and social institutions. Such tactics, in turn, required a broadening of the Communist parties' political bases, including a rapprochement with Christians, and the abandonment of rigid ideological commitments that had for a long time prevented these parties from performing any function other than that of a sterile, albeit vocal opposition.

### The Opium Theory

These considerations provided ample justification for Christians as well as Marxists to engage in a dialogue. The problem was to find a more or less solid basis on which to conduct exploratory conversations so that they would not degenerate into sterile argumentation or reciprocal proselytizing. In the attempt to discover that basis, a number of obstacles had to be removed. To begin with, there had to be a clarification of whether the doctrinal foundations of dialectical materialism would allow modification of the intransigently hostile attitude that Marxist parties and movements had traditionally maintained toward religion in general and Christianity in particular.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A complete bibliography of books and essays dealing with various aspects of the dialogue would fill several volumes. The problems briefly summarized in the present articles are extensively discussed in the following works: Nicholas Berdiaeff, *Le marxisme et la religion*, Paris, 1932, and *Le christianisme et la lutte des classes*, Paris, 1932; Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral*, Paris, 1936; John Lewis, Ed., *Christianity and the Socialist Revolution*, London, 1936; Gaston Fessard, *Le dialogue communiste-chrétien est-il possible?*, Paris, 1937; R. Vancourt, *Marxisme et pensée chrétienne*, Paris, 1948; Emil Brunner, *Communism, Capitalism, Christianity*, London, 1949; M. Mackinnon, *Christian Faith and Communist Faith*, London, 1953; Charles W. Lowry, *Communism and Christ*, London, 1954; Jean-Yves Calvez, *La pensée de Karl Marx*, Paris, 1953; J. Hommes, *Koexistenz—philosophisch beleuchtet*, Bonn, 1957; Marcel Reding, *Der politische Atheismus*, Graz, 1957; *Die Stellung des Marxismus-Leninismus zur Religion*, East Berlin, 1958; Emil Fuchs, *Marxismus und Christentum*, Leipzig, 1958; J. C. Hromadka, *Evangelium fuer Atheisten*, Berlin, 1958; Charles C. West, *Communism and the Theologians*, New York, 1958; Helmut Gollwitzer, *Die christliche Kirche und der kommunistische Atheismus*, Dortmund, 1959; *Il dialogo alla prova*, Florence, 1964; Michel Verret, *Les marxistes et la religion*, Paris, 1965; Milan Machovec, *Marxismus und dialektische Theologie*, Zurich, 1965; I. P. Dubarle, *Pour un dialogue avec les marxistes*, Paris, 1965; Erich Fromm, Ed., *Socialist Humanism*, Garden City, N. J., 1965; Giulio Birardi, *Marxismo e Cristianesimo*, Assisi, 1966; *Marxistisches und Christliches Weltverstaendnis*, Vienna and Freiburg, 1966; *Gespraechen der Paulus Gesellschaft, Christentum und Marxismus-Heute*, Vienna, Frankfurt, and Zurich, 1966; Antonio Capizzi,

The Marxist position on religion was clearly defined by Karl Marx in the much-quoted passage from his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in which he described religion as "the opium of the people." This evaluation was the logical outgrowth of his endorsement, even though with significant reservations, of Ludwig Feuerbach's theory of alienation. Both Feuerbach and Marx deemed religion to be a characteristic and probably fundamental form of alienation. The main difference between their interpretations was that Marx saw religious alienation, like all other types of estrangement, as the result of production relations, while Feuerbach viewed it as the individual's tendency to "objectify" human nature by assigning man's essence—his creative powers—to something transcendent and mysterious outside man. Friedrich Engels fully agreed with Marx. In recalling how deeply both he and Marx were influenced by Feuerbach's materialism before setting it right, Engels wrote: "Nothing exists outside Nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence."<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, in discussing "the fog of religion" in 1905, produced a slightly new variation on the opium theme by declaring that "religion is a spiritual vodka in which the slaves of capital drown their human shape and their claim to any decent life."<sup>4</sup> A few years later, he further delineated his position by listing atheistic propa-

*Dall'ateismo all'umanesimo*, Rome, 1967; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, New York, 1968; Lucio Lombardo Radice, *Socialismo e liberta*, Rome, 1968; James Klugmann, Ed., *Dialogue of Christianity and Marxism*, London, 1968; Roger Garaudy, *Perspectives de l'homme*, Paris, 1969; *De l'anathème au dialogue*, Paris, 1965; and *Marxisme du XXIème siècle*, Paris, 1966. Hans Braker's "Die Religionsphilosophische Diskussion in der Sowjetunion," *Marxismusstudien*, Vol. VI, Tuebingen, 1969, examines the Soviet position on some of the most important problems involved in the dialogue. Other significant contributions to the discussions have been made by the Catholic and Protestant theologians Karl Rahner, Gustav Wetter, Franz Cardinal Koenig, Wilhelm Dantine, Johann Baptist Metz, and James L. Adams, and by the Marxist theoreticians Cesare Luporini, Luciano Gruppi, Gilbert Mury, Asari Polikarov, Branko Bosniak, Walter Hollitscher, and Vuko Pavicevic.

<sup>3</sup> "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1942, Vol. II, pp. 322-23.

<sup>4</sup> "Socialism and Religion," V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, New York, 1943, Vol. XI, p. 68. Neither Marx nor Lenin, incidentally, showed excessive originality in attributing to religion stupefying or intoxicating qualities. The simile had been well known since the 18th-century French materialist Baron d'Holbach used it in his anti-religious broadside, *Le Christianisme dévoilé* (1761). Long before Marx, many poets and philosophers, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine, and Bruno Bauer, spoke of religion as having narcotic effects. See Helmut Gollwitzer, *The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion*, New York, 1970, pp. 15-23.

ganda among the main tasks of the Bolshevik party. He justified his hostility toward religion not only on philosophical grounds but also by stressing that "every defense of the idea of God" only serves the interest of reaction.<sup>5</sup>

In light of the unchallengeable authority with which the words of the "founding fathers" have been invested by Communists—not to mention the important role that "citatology" plays in Marxist discussions—the pronouncements of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on religion appeared to place insurmountable obstacles in the path of a constructive dialogue between Christians and Marxists. The rigidity of the Marxist system of thought seemingly rendered the difficulties of working out a theoretical justification for reconciling the two world-views even more imposing, for an outright repudiation of the opium theory and its variants would necessitate revision of some of the fundamental tenets of Marxism-Leninism, including those of historical materialism, the role of the superstructure, alienation, consciousness, and the Marxist interpretation of subject-object relations.

Marxist theoreticians intent on preparing the terrain for a dialogue with Christians plainly could not perform a radical overhauling of Marxism-Leninism without giving further impetus to the already massive ideological fragmentation of the Communist world; hence, they adopted an oblique rather than a frontal approach to the problem raised by the opium theory. They did not repudiate the theory but put it into a new context by using an analytical method based on Marxist assumptions. First, they pointed out that even if Marx considered religion to be the opium of the people, his statement reflected an outlook determined by conditions prevailing at the time and place he made it. According to this explanation, Marx's views on religion were fully justified in an era marked by industrial expansion, unlimited *laissez faire*, unchallenged bourgeois supremacy, and an unshakable alliance between the Church and various states. However, it does not follow—so the argument runs—that one should apply Marx's judgments about religion without reservation to all religions everywhere and at every historical moment. This is particularly

<sup>5</sup> Letters to Maxim Gorky in V. I. Lenin, *Ueber die Religion*, East Berlin, 1956, pp. 44-50. Gorky, along with Anatole Lunacharsky, V. A. Bazarov, and other Russian socialists, belonged to the group known as "God-builders," who, in contrast to the so-called "God-seekers," regarded the collective achievements of mankind as the realization of divinity. See Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism*, New York, 1963, pp. 90-91.

true in the postindustrial era, when the emergence of socialist states, the ideological conquests of Marxism-Leninism, and other new political and cultural conditions have compelled the Christian churches to stress not only the transcendental but also the "this-worldly" content of their respective messages.

## RELIGION REAPPRAISED

Marx and Engels showed that only at the end of the eighteenth century had Christianity lost all progressive meaning. In 1936, Maurice Thorez referred to the age-old "progressive function of Christianity." And in our day, it is worth emphasizing that among peoples oppressed by colonialism, the national struggle was initiated in the name of God before being carried forward in the name of country.

It is important, therefore, not to mutilate Marxist teaching, and to understand that religion is not only a mode of *perceiving* the world, but also a way of *being present* in the world, and of assuming an attitude in it. Consequently, we cannot deny or reject the profound claims of believers, even if these claims express themselves and are impelled by the thirst for illusory satisfactions. The function of Marxists-Leninists, on the contrary, is to assume those claims for their own account, and to discover the means to give them real satisfaction, in order that communism may appear to the mass of believers—as Marx said in the *Jewish Question*—"the realization in non-religious terms of the human foundation of Christianity."

—Roger Garaudy, "How to Build the City of Men," *Rinascita* (Rome) March 27, 1965.

... we must find the language of dialogue . . . , freed of the blinders of traditional anticlericalism (which, however, has its historical justifications). In a word, it is necessary to steer clear of all dogmatism and all sectarianism. Dogmatism would consist in considering the Catholic religion a reactionary and obscurantist bloc just at the moment when it is more than ever setting itself in motion, is manifesting a diversity of tendencies like those which oppose each other in history and an overall and official orientation which, far from amounting to absolute social regression, is opening up to the future, even though it still keeps resolutely clear of the road of revolution. Sectarianism would mean that, unconscious of the real progress and confined in a maximum program which Christianity's social course renders unacceptable to the present-day Church, we rejected all search for points of agreement for which the Catholics, in part if not in toto, are already ready.

—Jacques Milhau, "Observations on the Work of the Council," *La nouvelle critique* (Paris), No. 178, August-September, 1966.

Whatever Marx said, a prominent Marxist theoretician concluded, "religion is not always and everywhere an opiate of the people."<sup>6</sup>

In relativizing the opium theory—a patently heretical move from the standpoint of orthodox Marxism—the Communist promoters of the dialogue appealed to Marx himself. They contended that Marx's remark on religion had hitherto been misunderstood because it had been lifted out of context. The full paragraph in which it occurs reads:

*Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.<sup>7</sup>*

Marx's italicization of the words "expression" and "protest" in the opening sentence enabled neo-Marxist exegetists to reinterpret the meaning of the entire passage.

These exegetists asserted that if Marx had looked upon religion as the expression of real distress, he had obviously regarded religion as a historical phenomenon subject to uninterrupted change in accordance with the laws of dialectical progression. This implied that any judgment about religion, as about all phenomena falling under these laws, applied only to the specific stage through which it was then passing in the course of its development. Consequently, religion might have been—indeed was—the opium of the people in certain historical periods, including that of the industrial revolution and the postfeudal world of a victorious bourgeoisie; but it might exhibit a different character at other historical junctures. In any case, to the Marxist promoters of the dialogue, Marx's reference to religion as an "expression of distress" clearly indicated that, in speaking of opium, Marx had had in mind opium's soothing rather than its stultifying effects.

Moreover, the neo-Marxist reinterpreters of the opium theory maintained that Marx, in emphasizing

that religion not only reflected distress but also protested its cause, had apparently recognized the "positive"—that is, the revolutionary—nature of religion. To bolster their point, they cited Engels' well-known distinction between apocalyptic and Constantinian Christianity. The first, according to Engels, had possessed a marked socialist content, "as far as it was possible at that time," but the second had turned the millenarian message addressed to the enslaved and the impoverished into a state religion designed to protect the interests of exploiting classes.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Christian prophecy had in its early stages clearly transcended the limits of a passive moral idealism by trying to eliminate poverty "in the world and not in heaven."<sup>9</sup> In Engels' eyes, the apocalyptic and revolutionary content of Christianity was clearly discernible in the heretical religious movements of the Middle Ages, in the theology of the German radical reformer Thomas Muenzer, and even in the initial manifestations of the Lutheran and Calvinist reform movements.<sup>10</sup> The neo-Marxists hold, therefore, that there are no doctrinal obstacles to a collaboration with Christians, provided that the Christian message remains, or becomes again, a "protest" against existing conditions and does not try to justify or to perpetuate those conditions in the name of other-worldly promises and expectations.

From the Christian point of view, there is little, if any, objection to such attempts to dispose of the opium theory by reinterpreting the Marxist classics. Most Christian theologians agree wholeheartedly with the neo-Marxists on the "protesting" nature of Christianity even though they refuse to attribute to religion a revolutionary character in the Marxist sense. They place the main emphasis on the Christian concern for justice and love and the Christian concept of individual responsibility. As for the social radicalism inherent in the Christian prophecy, some theologians believe that it may have been the redemptory message of Christianity that inspired Marx, and they point to some striking analogies between Christian eschatology and the great historical drama as conceived by Marx and Engels. For in the Marxian vision, too, the corruption of the world is attributed to an original sin—the introduction of private property; redemption from that sin has to come through the atonement of a sacrificial lamb—the proletariat; the message of salvation is contained in a holy writ—

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Mury (formerly deputy director of the French Communist Party's ideological institute and now one of the chief theoreticians of a dissident pro-Chinese splinter group) at the Salzburg Conference on Christianity and Marxism (*Volksstimme* [Vienna], May 9, 1965). Similar conclusions were reached by other Marxist theoreticians, among them Professor Lucio Lombardo Radice (*L'Unità* [Rome], Feb. 6, 1966), Cesare Luporini (*Rinascita* [Rome], March 27, 1965), and Roger Garaudy (*Marxisme au XXIème siècle*, pp. 150-53).

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, "Einleitung zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter referred to as MEGA), Frankfurt and Berlin, 1927-33, Vol. I/1, pp. 607-08. Italics in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow, 1955, pp. 316-17.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Kautsky, quoted in MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 98-99.



the writings of Marx and Engels. With Lenin, the analogies (especially with Catholicism) become more complete: the interpretation of faith is entrusted to an infallible authority—the Central Committee of the Communist party; and the individual cannot discover truth without being in vital communion with the organism in which the spirit of truth resides.<sup>11</sup>

## The Atheism Issue

Regardless of the validity of such comparisons, however, the fostering of a dialogue also necessitated clarification of the Marxist position on another momentous issue—namely, the uncompromising atheism inherent in the materialist conception of the world. Here again the founding fathers seemed to be most explicit. In discussing the development of Communist theories, Marx wrote that “communism begins from the outset with atheism,” even though atheism is at first far from being communism.<sup>12</sup> He stressed that the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism; religion is but the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who “either has not yet found himself or has already lost himself again.”<sup>13</sup> In Engels’ opinion, God and supernatural powers are mere illusions or fantasies that reflect “in man’s mind those external forces which control [his] daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the forms of supernatural forces.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, atheism appears to be not only an integral part of the materialist world-view but also an important element in the class struggle, for it promotes the process of demystification that is to bring about the

emergence of true human consciousness. Lenin had certainly reached this conclusion when he declared in a letter to Maxim Gorky: “God is (historically and socially) first of all a complex of ideas engendered by the ignorance of mankind . . . ideas which perpetuate this ignorance and blunt the class struggle. . . .”<sup>15</sup> Lenin’s successors followed the same line of reasoning in listing atheistic propaganda among the paramount tasks of the Communist party.

One of the main reasons why Marxists deem “citatology” a most effective method of dialectical reasoning is the abundance of contradictory or ambiguous statements in the writings of the founding fathers. Indeed, many fundamental observations in these works are either contradicted by other equally apodictic pronouncements in them or are couched in sufficiently ambiguous terms to be reinterpreted according to dialectical needs. Those apropos of religion are particularly suitable for adroit dialectical manipulation. True, Marx said that communism (the elimination of self-alienation) begins with atheism; yet he also underscored that atheism no longer has any meaning, for socialism, which recognizes the sensuous consciousness of man and nature as the essence, no longer stands in need of a mediation such as that offered by atheism.<sup>16</sup> True, Engels defined religion as “an illusion” and “a fantasy”; but he also strongly criticized Eugen Duehring and the Bakuninists for trying to impose atheism on the working class. He particularly objected to Duehring’s efforts to “incite gendarmes of the future against religion” instead of waiting for religion to die a natural death.<sup>17</sup> True, Lenin wrote that “our propaganda necessarily includes the propaganda of atheism;”<sup>18</sup> but he also said—before the Bolshevik seizure of power—that “everyone must be perfectly free not only to belong to any religion he pleases, but he must be free to preach his religion. . . .”<sup>19</sup> While neither the ambiguous nor the contradictory statements on religion would justify an outright rejection of atheism as an integral part of dialectical materialism, they have enabled many neo-Marxists to reconcile the atheistic premises of Marxism-Leninism with an acknowledgment of the positive functions that religion might play in the revolutionary transformation of the world.

In effecting the reconciliation, these Marxist philosophers have had to relativize the concept of

<sup>11</sup> Wetter, *op. cit.*, pp. 559-60, and West, *op. cit.*, p. 29. The French sociologist Raymond Aron is generally credited with defining communism as “a secular religion,” but in fact he had numerous predecessors. Oswald Spengler had many years earlier described Christianity as “the grandmother of Bolshevism.” Nikolai Berdiaev had viewed Russian Bolshevism as “a kind of sectarian idolatrous religion which has its own scriptures, catechism, Messiah and inverted theocracy, its own inquisition and eschatology.” (West, *op. cit.*, p. 14). Charles W. Lowry (*op. cit.*) had drawn up a table of parallel doctrines in Christianity and Marxism. The Protestant theologian Paul Tillich had thought that socialism was merely an upsurge of religious forces. (Gollwitzer, *The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion*, p. 23.) Jules Monnerot, the French sociologist, had described communism as “twentieth-century Islam.” (*La sociologie du communisme*, Paris, 1953.) The messianic content of communism has been thoroughly examined by various contributors to *Marxismusstudien* and by E. Sarkisyanz in *Russland und der Messianismus des Orients*, Tuebingen, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Moscow, 1967, p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> *MEGA*, Vol. I/1, p. 607.

<sup>14</sup> Engels, *Anti-Duehring*, Moscow, 1962, p. 432.

<sup>15</sup> Lenin, *On Religion*, New York, 1935, pp. 45-46.

<sup>16</sup> *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> *Anti-Duehring*, p. 435.

<sup>18</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. XI, p. 661.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 284.

atheism to render it more flexible. Their task was facilitated by the traditional Marxist differentiation of several types of atheism, each supposedly determined by concrete social and economic conditions and the level of development of science and materialist philosophy at a given period.<sup>20</sup> According to this classification, there was first the naive and speculative atheism of the Greek philosophers, who combined rejection of religious faith with admission of the existence of gods. Then came the inconsistent or limited bourgeois atheism (sometimes described as "vulgar atheism") of the French materialists and the Young Hegelians. The most perfect and final form of atheism, it is alleged, rests on the philosophical basis of dialectical and historical materialism as set forth and developed by Marx and his successors. This form of atheism is held to contain an unassailable critique of religion, a critique whose ultimate function is to destroy the social and economic roots from which religions have sprung. Such a categorization implies that atheism should be viewed mainly as an instrument in the class struggle that is to culminate in the emergence of the ideal Communist society.

Whether or not they regard the class struggle as the paramount driving force in human history, many Christian participants in the dialogue have been inclined to see it as an important part of efforts to eliminate social injustice and to put an end to man's alienation. Furthermore, in the opinion of one group of these theologians, atheism does not constitute a central theme in Marxism; it is not the logical consequence of the system of dialectical materialism but, rather, the motive for the creation of that system.<sup>21</sup> Another group has looked upon atheism as merely one of the many Marxist *Kampfbegriffe*—that is, a dialectical weapon which lacks organic links to the end for whose attainment it is being used.<sup>22</sup> According to this view, the essence of Marxism, both as a prophecy and as a blueprint for revolutionary action, is faith in redemption, even if that redemption is confined to the finite aspects of the human condition.

Therefore, most thinkers on both sides have felt that the dialogue should be conducted on the basis of analogous, though methodologically conflicting endeavors to improve or to perfect man's terrestrial

existence. In this connection, they like to recall the words of the French Catholic writer Georges Bernanos, who pointed out that "the restoration of a human world is not a theological but rather a social problem."<sup>23</sup> If such is the case, Christian humanism and Marxist humanism ought to provide the framework in which the difficult task of social "restoration" could be jointly undertaken.

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### Humanism as an Approach

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At first glance, this approach seems to be a reasonably simple and straightforward solution to the matter. On close examination, however, it becomes quite obvious that putting the emphasis on the "this-worldly" concerns of Christianity or turning Marxism into a social anthropology raises no less difficult questions than those posed by atheism or the opium theory; for if humanism is to provide the connecting link between the two world-views, an agreement has to be reached on the basic issue at the core of every humanistic pursuit: freedom. In theory, both world-views consider freedom the ultimate stage of human fulfillment. Christians are to arrive at that stage through love and justice; Marxists, by elevating their conscious activities to the apex through increasing cognition of the laws of nature and society. But for the Christian, freedom cannot exist without freedom of the spirit. The Marxist, on the other hand, deems the abolition of classes and the collectivization of the means of production to be the indispensable precondition for "leaping from the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom."<sup>24</sup>

On this point, the dialogue must inevitably transcend the limits of metaphysical, anthropological or sociological speculations; to borrow Engels' metaphor, it has to leap from the realm of theory into that of *praxis*. If freedom means the fulfillment of the individual through self-creation, as neo-Marxists argue, how do those self-creating activities manifest themselves in Communist societies? The question is of critical importance since the answer affords the only

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<sup>20</sup> M. Rosenthal and P. Yudin, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Moscow, 1967, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Gollwitzer, *The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>22</sup> Hromadka, Machovec, and Reding (see references in fn. 2) all adhere to more or less this line of reasoning.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Konrad Farner in the Swiss Communist weekly *Vorwaerts* (Basel), Sept. 21, 1962. Author of the recently published *Der Aufstand der Abstrakt-Konkreten*, Neiwied, 1970, art historian Farner is one of the most articulate Marxist supporters of the dialogue.

<sup>24</sup> Engels, *Anti-Duehring*, pp. 311-12. I have examined the Christian and Marxist interpretations of humanism in "In Search of Humanism," *Problems of Communism*, September-October, 1965, and in "The Christian-Marxist Dialogue," *Communist Affairs*, July-August, 1967.

criterion by which one can effectively gauge the prospects of the dialogue.

That many Christians have posed this question does not necessarily reflect their concern over the sincerity of the Marxist participants in the dialogue. It does suggest, however, serious misgivings about the ability of Communist societies, as they are known today, to develop constitutional, political and social mechanisms which would guarantee individual freedom in the Christian sense. Clearly, that kind of freedom cannot be fully enjoyed as long as the very concept of freedom is inseparably linked with the class struggle on a national as well as international scale—a struggle whose objectives and methods are determined by all-powerful party bureaucracies. In this regard, it has been pointed out that the Communists who show the greatest willingness to reinterpret the orthodox Marxist-Leninist concept of freedom belong to parties not in power and thus are not in a position to limit or extend the freedom of any persons except those subject to party discipline. In other words, the commitment of these Communists to humanistic principles based on respect for individual rights is strictly theoretical, even if sincere. Not even a theoretical reinterpretation of freedom has taken place in the Communist-run countries, especially the Soviet Union, which is supposed to serve as the model for the great bulk of those nations with preponderantly Christian populations.<sup>25</sup>

The contrasting attitudes toward religion of Communists in and out of power are perhaps best illustrated by the polemics that have gone on between Italian neo-Marxists engaged in dialogue with Christians and Soviet theoreticians advocating strict adherence to a markedly atheistic position. Leonid Ilichev, at the time one of the Soviet party's chief ideologists, triggered the debate in 1963 with a report on ideological questions to the Soviet Central Committee. Urging the intensification of atheistic propaganda in the USSR, he asserted that "religion

cannot but serve as a brake on scientific progress . . . and it supports a morality diametrically opposed to the principles of the moral code of the builders of communism."<sup>26</sup> In refutation, Professor Lucio Lombardo Radice, a member of the Italian party's Central Committee and one of the most prominent participants in the dialogue, described the Ilichev theses as an over-simplification which "will be of little or no use today, just as it has been of little or no use in the past," and he stressed that the alienation of individuals living in Communist societies should not be ascribed to residues or survivals of capitalism typified by religion. If those "residues" had not disappeared from Soviet society, the cause of the resulting estrangement should not be sought in religion but rather in the conditions of inferiority in which Soviet citizens found themselves because they harbored "certain opinions which one cannot express or cannot fully express or can only express by giving up certain rights."<sup>27</sup>

These conditions to which the Italian theoretician referred continue to prevail in most Communist-run states. The issue of religious freedom, it is true, has lost some of its acuteness in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and even Poland; however, religious freedom cannot be looked at in isolation, it cannot be separated from other freedoms, if humanism is to provide the basis for an effective coordination of efforts directed at improving the human condition. Thus, the central issue of the dialogue remains unresolved, even though some of the problems raised by the dialogue have been settled. This judgment does not mean that the dialogue is either futile or superfluous. It only suggests that the exchanges are unlikely to yield lasting and positive fruits as long as the Communist systems persist in denying to the individual those fundamental human rights whose possession alone can enable him to fulfill himself in accordance with either the Christian or the Marxist dispensation.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Soviet theoreticians have recently urged the stepping up of atheistic propaganda, particularly in the republics inhabited by Muslims.

<sup>26</sup> *Rinascita*, July 4, 1964.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

# Books

## Stalinist Turned Reformer

By Carl A. Linden

*Khrushchev Remembers.* Trans. and ed. by Strobe Talbot; introduction, commentary and notes by Edward Crankshaw. Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1970.

IN FAIRNESS TO the reader, a cautionary note should preface any assessment of the materials gathered under the title, *Khrushchev Remembers*. All reviews can at present only be tentative inasmuch as what is being reviewed has not yet been fully clarified. Are these materials true Khrushcheviana or apocrypha? The publishers say they are Khrushchev's "reminiscences" and "speak for themselves," but they have so far refused to provide any convincing verification of their assertions, on the ground that they have to protect their sources. We do not know exactly how the materials reached the West or through whose hands they may have passed: *Time-Life* and Little, Brown & Company, the publishers, merely say the materials emanated "from various sources at various times and in various circumstances"; and they prudently concede that "whether the author intended or expected his words ever to find their way into print,

either in his own country or in the West, is a matter of speculation." Whether the publishers themselves have all the missing links in the story is by no means certain. Khrushchev's own disavowal of authorship in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* was equivocal: it was so phrased that it could be read as meaning only that the materials published in the West were not *authorized* by him, and not that they did not *originate* with him.<sup>1</sup> The belated publication of the statement seven days after it was dated suggests that the So-

<sup>1</sup> Khrushchev's statement, published in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* on Nov. 17, 1970, read as follows: "As is evident from press reports in the United States of America and in some other capitalist countries, the so-called memoirs or reminiscences of N.S. Khrushchev are being prepared for publication. They are fabrications, and I am indignant over them. I have never transmitted to anyone—neither to *Time* nor any other foreign publisher—memoirs or materials of that nature. Nor have I handed over such materials to a Soviet publishing house. Therefore, I declare all these "memoirs" to be forgeries. *Time* and again the mercenary bourgeois press has been caught in such falsehoods." It should be noted that Khrushchev's narrow affirmation that he had "never transmitted to anyone" any materials in the nature of memoirs scarcely constituted proof that the materials published in the West—which he almost certainly had not yet seen—were forgeries. It is also worth noting that while *Izvestia* gave the date of Khrushchev's denial as November 10, *Pravda* omitted it.

viet authorities' may have been dissatisfied with Khrushchev's imprecision.

But if *Khrushchev Remembers* is the shadow work of forgers, they must be accounted true masters of their art. With very few exceptions, the manner of speech and the narrative pattern are thoroughly Khrushchevian. Sir William Hayter, former British ambassador to Moscow, reacted to the book in much the same way as have others who either had personal contacts with Khrushchev or have closely followed his past statements, formal and informal. "Having just emerged from reading the book," Sir William remarked, "I have the strong impression of having resumed my personal intercourse with him."

At this stage, perhaps the most plausible and widely accepted hypothesis is that Khrushchev was indeed the original source of the great bulk of the materials, but that they in one way or another passed out of his control into other hands. It is surmised that for various political motives the materials then underwent some kind of filtering process and that this accounts for the omission of matters which Khrushchev might have been expected to mention,