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# God and Marxism

J. G. JOHNSON

The ambiguity of the word 'and' caused me some difficulty. I do not know whether I should talk on what God thinks about Marxism or what Marxists talk about God. In either case the problem seems to be very easily solved. The Bible says, 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God' (Ps. 14, 1). The Marxists say that there is no God as such. As one concerned with the total welfare of my neighbour, the atheism of Marxists becomes my own personal problem and a challenge.

*What do we understand by the term 'God'?*

In the Philosophy-Lexicon published by the Bibliographisches Institute, Leipzig, East Germany, the word 'God' is omitted. But much is said about religion, superstition, etc. Even those who believe in God vary in their understanding of God and His work. Gandhi said, 'A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu.'<sup>1</sup> In Carvaka and Sankhya philosophies existence of God is a myth. In Jainism 'Tirthankaras' took the place of God. Some talk about monotheism, others about polytheism, pantheism, pan-en-theism, deism, theism, etc.

Here I wish to point out the crucial questions that Dr. P. David raises:<sup>2</sup>

1. Can God be God without the Bible?
2. Can God be God without Christ?
3. Can God be God without Church and its creeds and confessions?

For our study, we mean by God, the One, whom Jesus revealed as Father and the One in whom we live and move and have our being. The Communists talk much about religion, for it is concrete. In history religion is evident. They do not talk much about God except to say there is no such abstract thing.

<sup>1</sup> *Young India*, 24 April 1924.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *The Gospel Witness*, February 1968, p. 131.

## *What is Marxism?*

Once Marx said, for fun perhaps, 'Well, I'm not a Marxist, you know!'<sup>3</sup> Marx is said to be the seed of the O.T. prophets. Judaeo-Christian prophetic traditions are found in Marxist humanism; but the method to achieve this is crude Greaco-Roman militarism. Marxism is not a bundle of convictions; it is the basis for a powerful political movement which rules more than 1/3 of the world. Nehru dismissed Marxism as an out-of-date nineteenth century philosophy.<sup>4</sup> V. Afanasyev defines Marxist philosophy as dialectical materialism which governs the development of the material world. It is a means of understanding and transforming the world.<sup>5</sup> The Czech protestant theologian Joseph L. Hromadka said, 'We have to understand that the atheism of *dialectical* materialism is a positive struggle for man, for his adequate self-understanding, for a better order of social and political life, for a construction of a society in which all class differences will gradually fade away.'<sup>6</sup> Erhard Aufrecht defines Marxism as what is proclaimed, practised and believed today in the name of the Communist party.<sup>7</sup> Neo-Marxism is not accepted by the Communists.

## *God, Marxism and Matter*

Nyaya philosophy that denies *creatio ex nihilo*, accepts God as an architect of the universe, who constructed it with eternal atoms, space, time, mind and souls. Matter is co-existent with God. For the Carvakas the world came into existence by the spontaneous combination of the four material elements. It is difficult to explain how and why certain objects got life and consciousness and not others. The mind controls the matter and not *vice versa*. Man is on the top of the pyramid of nature. In case of a fire, the first thing we want to save is human life. For Marxism matter is eternal; it is the ultimate reality and therefore there is no such other ultimate reality as God. Engels could not tolerate Dühring's view of the partial reality of matter. Life originates in matter, but it is man who decides the value of matter. Morality depends on matter. Character, confidence, love, beauty and faith become a matter of economics and politics. Just as for Christians the love of God is the basis for life, and for Freud sex is the basis, for Marxists matter is all in all. Material abundance for the masses is the precondition of human freedom. Marxists talk about different types of matter and motion. There is no matter without motion and no motion

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Post, *The German Heritage*, Cologne 1967, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> V. Afanasyev, *Marxist Philosophy*, Moscow 1965, pp. 339 ff.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Bennett, *Christianity and Communism Today*, New York 1960, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> J. Hromadka, *Theology between Yesterday and Today*, Philadelphia 1957, pp. 83 ff.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Erhard Aufrecht, *Der Mensch im Marxismus*, Oldenburg 1952, p. 9.

without matter. God is not the creator and He is not the prime mover. There is no answer to the question, why matter should be, and why it should move.

William Temple observes that Christianity is the most avowedly materialistic of all the great religions. The Christian is involved in realizing the promised bliss of the other world here in this world also. Matter helps us to understand the omniscience of God. But matter should not stand between us and God. I would like to join with Teilhard de Chardin in saying, 'Blessed be you, universal matter, immeasurable time, boundless ether, triple abyss of stars and atoms and generations: You who by overflowing and dissolving our narrow standards of measurement reveal to us the dimensions of God.'<sup>8</sup>

According to Alf Lohne, the recorded sayings of Jesus deal more with money than with most other subjects. Sixteen out of 36 parables deal with the right or wrong use of money. In the Synoptic Gospels, one verse in every six is on the matter of money and property.<sup>9</sup> Communism is universal asceticism where nobody can possess any property. The Bible talks about mutual aid (Acts 4:31-35; II Cor. 8:1-5). Christians are concerned about the welfare of this world. Colin Brown observes, where capitalist economics have flourished, workers have better standard and political freedom.<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that capitalism is a cherished form of political organization. The greatest lie possible is that material and intellectual help, devoid of the spiritual, is enough for man.

### *Religion and Marxism*

Marx said, the criticism on religion is the prerequisite of all criticisms. He wanted the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people in order that real happiness could be put in its place. Engels wrote, 'All religion, however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of these external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.'<sup>11</sup> Lenin writes that religion provides a cheap justification to capitalists who exploit the labourers by teaching them to be charitable.<sup>12</sup> We know a number of superstitious beliefs came to exist due to the absence of a full knowledge of God. Barthians are in one sense correct when they say that 'religion' is criminal arrogance against God. But according to Marxist vocabulary, religion includes revelation in Jesus Christ also. In revolution there is no place for the religious virtues, for revolution needs the area to be

<sup>8</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, London 1970, pp. 63 ff.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Alf Lohne in 'Review', October 1969, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> cf. 'Unfulfilled Prophecies of Karl Marx', in *Christianity Today*, July 1971, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow 1962, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> W. Lenin, *Über die Religion*, Berlin 1965, p. 21 f.

paralysed through unemployment, frustration, corruption and political instability, so that the proletariat can overthrow the existing system and crush capitalism. Marxists believe that religion will wither out from the society according to the Lamarck's Law of Use and Disuse. But the Marxist is to help speed away this process, for religion stands in the way of progress.

Radhakrishnan writes, 'Communism may well be called a Christian heresy,—a heresy because it is opposed to Christian orthodoxy but not necessarily to Christian truth and Christian principles.'<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre calls Marxism the historical successor of Christianity, for Marxism shares in good measure both the content and the functions of Christianity as an interpretation of human existence.<sup>14</sup> Engels compares early Christianity with the labour movement, and 'it began as a religion of slaves and the freed, the poor and outlawed, of the people defeated and crushed by the force of Rome.'<sup>15</sup> Macmurray maintains that in practice Communism is more truly Christian than Christianity itself!<sup>16</sup>

Communism wants to change the individual, by force if necessary, by changing the society. Christianity changes the society by first changing the individual by love. Both Christianity and Communism preach the coming deliverance from evil. There is no new humanism that Marxism preaches, that is not in Christianity. Feuerbach mentioned, 'Christianity is correct in its content, mistaken in its form.' A Marxist has faith in Marxism rather than in Marx. A Christian has faith in the Person Jesus rather than in Christian ethics or economics.

In their anxiety to bring a substitute to religion, they paved the way for Marxism itself to become a secularized religion.<sup>17</sup> No other religion has so much missionary zeal to achieve its ends as Marxism. Many of its early pioneers witnessed to the infallibility of Marxism and embraced martyrdom like the apostles. It never hesitated to burn its heretics who found counter methods to set man free from the bondage of the 'heathen' capitalism. In 1949, the General Committee of the Comsomol in Estonia, proclaimed the Decalogue of Communism. The third commandment is: 'Advise your friends to avoid clergymen and Christians.'<sup>18</sup>

Nietzsche called Christianity 'Platonism for the masses'. Even before Marx, many people connected religion and opium.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, Delhi 1955, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, London 1968, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> Musical records are now sold in the USSR with such titles as 'If Lenin walks with me', 'I am happy with Lenin', and 'Lenin lives in my Heart'. Cf. D. V. Benson, *Christianity, Communism and Survival*, California 1971, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> R. Tobias, *Communist Christian Encounter*, Indianapolis 1956, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed study, see H. Gollwitzer's *Die Marxistische Religionskritik und Christliche Glaube*, Munich 1970, pp. 23–28.

Lenin said religion is the brandy for the masses. Marxists changed the saying, 'Religion is the opium of the masses' to *for* the masses. It implies religion is given as opiate to the masses to keep them from revolting against capitalism. Therefore, religion is counter-revolutionary and it must be done away with. But we know that not only the poor people believe in religion, but also the rich. Even before society was divided into men with capital and men without capital, religion existed. Lenin stresses the point that religion was born out of fear.<sup>20</sup> But where is the man who never had fear or anxiety? It is true, rather, that in our country Marxism became the opium for the proletariat by making them of a future utopian society. These addicts are interested more in destroying than co-operating with others in the progress of our country.

### *Atheism and Marxism*

Marx wrote in his school essays, 'Who should not gladly endure sorrows, when he knows that through his continuing in Christ, through his works God is honoured?'<sup>21</sup> Many years later, the same Marx wrote, 'If God exists as a Creator, then the human being becomes less important or indeed nothing.' Lenin observes that the scientific anti-religious propaganda will not provoke the religious feelings of the believers to fanaticism.<sup>22</sup> He polemicized those who tried to reconcile Marxism and religion.<sup>23</sup> Marx took from Feuerbach the concept of alienation of man from his real situation. God is man's imaginary realization, free from all worldly ties projected as transcendent. Man created God in his own image. History of religions shows how distorted such man-made gods are, just as the sin stained man himself.

Marxists firmly believe that science solves the problems of the mysteries of the universe. We Christians do not need a God of the gaps. God as the sustainer is represented by 'Tension' in the dialectical materialism. Marxists never fail to show that history is on the side of atheism and so religion will have a natural death. Since they cannot wait till that period, they strangle religion through atheistic propaganda. But the more you hit, like the nail, the deeper it goes.

Atheism existed even in the ancient world (Ps. 14, 1). Marxists are not the only people who are atheists. I think the Marxist atheists are perhaps more preferable than the non-Marxist ones, for the former believe in a 'Kingdom of Freedom and Peace' at least on the earth, whereas the latter tends to be a pessimistic existentialist who finds everywhere the dysteleo-

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<sup>20</sup> Lenin, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 ff.

<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20. Gorki belonged to this group for some time.

logical surds and absurdity. When Lenin says, 'Down with God', it is no proof for the non-existence of God, but it is the rejection of God. The Christian who says 'Lord, Lord,' but who does not even think of doing His will, also practises atheism. Evans is correct in saying, 'In a world of suffering and exploitation, the "this-worldly" moral zeal of some atheistic Communists is probably more acceptable to God than the "other-worldly" indifference of some Christians.'<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, in atheism the divine values are replaced by human ones. Because man is stained by sins, his judgements are also not correct. If we point one finger accusing the guilt of violence in putting down the believers, three fingers point to us for the crusades, intolerance and inquisition.

The 1936 constitution of USSR says, 'Freedom of exercise for religious cults and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens.' This paper-freedom for cults does not include religious propaganda. *Izvestia* wrote, 'To be an atheist for one's own sake, leaving others to their own ideas, does not coincide with the proletarian Bolshevist methods of Marxism-Leninism.'<sup>25</sup> No member of the party could be a believer. Atheism is not a private affair, but one should proclaim it. In 1929 the League of Militant Atheists claimed five million active members and had a five-year plan to raise that to seventeen million. But in 1936 the membership dropped to two million.<sup>26</sup> The scapegoats are the Trotskyists, who were said to have persecuted the Christians to increase the hostility of the people against the Government.<sup>27</sup> This league was disbanded in 1941, when the Bolshevists needed the support of the Church against Hitler. But this League of Militant Atheists was revived with full vigour in 1957. The League of Militant Atheists is nothing but a tool in the hands of the party. To win the support of the Church they distributed a circular to anti-religious propagandists in December 1938. It says, 'Christianity should not be identified with capitalism. Early Christians were not rich, and they did not pay much attention to wealth. Christianity should not be identified with other religions... The beneficial role Christianity played in the development of family relations should not be denied, for it helped to establish monogamy...it eliminated bloody and orgiastic rites...'<sup>28</sup>

In China the Communists allowed the Christians to teach the existence of God, but He must be a God who approves the party-programme of the Maoists.<sup>29</sup> A few Buddhists favour Marxism, saying that Buddhism is no religion and there is no

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<sup>24</sup> D. Evans, *Communist Faith and Christian Faith*, London 1965, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> *Izvestia*, 24 April 1929, quoted by Benson, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Tobias, *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 101.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245 f.

<sup>29</sup> *A Christian's Handbook on Communism*, New York 1962, p. 58.

God. So long as the Buddhist believes in Karma theory, he justifies suffering as the punishment of their deeds in the previous birth.

If there is no atheism, people will not give absolute loyalty and obedience to the party, but to God (*cf.* Acts 5:29). Non-Marxist atheists think that the unenlightened violent methods to establish atheism used by Marxists, particularly by Stalinists, very much damaged the cause and prestige of atheism. Likewise the unsympathetic attitude and commonplace arguments of the clergy drive many to atheism. As Evans says, the revelation of God and man in Jesus Christ is neither proved nor disproved by science. It is either accepted in faith or rejected in unfaith.<sup>30</sup> Marxist-atheism says, man is fundamentally irreligious. Christianity accepts this statement. Paul writes, 'Remember that you were... without God in the world (Eph. 2:12)'. But Christ called us and reconciled us with God. We need not feel sorry when we cannot produce convincing proofs for defending the existence of God. But let us not deny God by our mistrust. It is God who defends our faith and not *vice versa*. In defending the rights of the poor, we can demonstrate the love of God (*cf.* 1 John 3:17).

There is no atheism today that does not claim to be humanistic. Some say, since religion was cruel and atrocious, for the sake of humanity they want to be atheists. The French Catholic Professor Jacques Maritain is correct when he says that the atheism of Communism originates through the fault of a Christian world so unfaithful to its own principles.<sup>31</sup> People ask if the world should be different, without famine or war, if there were a loving and intelligent God. The answer is not atheism, but the dialectical tension between the God-created world and the fallen world. The synthesis is Jesus as both the Way and Destination, Whose way passes through Gethsemane and Calvary; the destination is freedom and peace. James Klugmann says that there is no need of a redeemer, for man is neither fallen nor risen. Man is bound by doubts and ignorance which could be removed by education.<sup>32</sup> The same doubt that could shake faith in God can also shatter the faith in atheism. When a Christian tries to escape from the tension, i.e. the onslaughts of atheism, he ceases to be an active Christian.

### *God, Marxism and Society*

Marxism says that the eternal quantitative changes in matter create qualitatively new beings and finally the classless society. Still the Marxists want to occupy the power structure of a country to change the history of society. But God works through

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<sup>30</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> J. Maritain, *True Humanism*, New York 1938, p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> J. Klugmann, 'The Marxist Hope', in G. B. Caird (ed.), *The Christian Hope*, London 1970, p. 59.



individuals and small fellowships to accomplish His purposes in history. In Marxism, history unfolds itself because of the laws of dialectic. In Christianity God guides and rectifies the events of the history. Many atrocities that happened in history were man-made. To say such horrible events happened under the guidance of God is blasphemy. God, who has not enslaved the progress of history, has to rectify it at times as He did for fallen Adam. The Communists, who offered their lives for their ideology, because of the secular eschatology of Marxism, knew nothing about the future, except the satisfaction that they lost their lives because of the 'good' of the society. But the Christian martyrs believed in the glorious future because of the individual and social eschatology of Christianity.

The Christian God identifies Himself with humanity. He feels one with the persecuted (*cf.* Acts 9:4). Marxism stresses that a bad society produces bad people and a good society can produce good ones. But the Christian God wants the radical change of heart in the bad ones so that there may be radical changes in the society.

### Conclusion

The Bible does not prohibit attempts to improve the society made by the non-Christians. The 1948 Lambeth Conference called upon Christian people to recognize that in Communism there are 'elements which are a true judgement on the existing social and economic order'.<sup>33</sup> Just for the reason the atheists have said something good, we need not belittle it. Already in 1957 Hromadka wrote: 'And we have to help the Communists to understand their own anti-religious critique more adequately, or more constructively, and to free themselves from a purely negative, shallow anti-religious propaganda. If a Christian grasps the meaning of Marxistic humanism, and if a Communist penetrates beyond all religious myths and superstitions to the depth of the prophetic struggle for the real God... then both of them may establish a firm basis of a fertile, creative controversy. We do not believe in any possibility of an ideological synthesis of Communism and Christian faith. Such a synthesis is impossible. They find themselves on a different level. However, a new atmosphere may be created.'<sup>34</sup> But the protagonists of a dialogical approach to Christianity had adverse political implications. The Czech Marxists and the 'neo-Marxists' in Yugoslavia have experienced this.<sup>35</sup> The International Commission for Labour Parties in Moscow in 1969, sounded a friendly tone on the possibility of working together with the believers against

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<sup>33</sup> Resolutions 25 and 26, quoted by Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>34</sup> Hromadka, *op. cit.*, pp. 83 ff.

<sup>35</sup> P. Mojzes, 'Politics and the Christian-Marxist Dialogue', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 1971, p. 91.

imperialism and monopolists. Humanism is no monopoly of Christians.

Stalin has correctly observed, 'To close Churches is easy; but the peasants build churches in their souls.'<sup>36</sup>

Religion is joy. The author of Ecclesiastes, who possessed more than anybody else of his time, found everything as vanity of vanities by looking *under* the sun. But Paul, the condemned prisoner, who had nothing but faith in God, could be happy in Christ by looking *above*. When two people suffer, one curses the Karma and the society, and the other is patient as Job and says like David, 'let me fall into the hands of the Lord' (II Sam. 24, 14). One may call religion opium. For us it is the dynamite to destroy the old humanity and create the new one.

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<sup>36</sup> Tobias, *op. cit.*, p. 20.