MARXIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Roger Garaudy delivered the paper which appears here in an abridged form, at St. Michael’s College Toronto. It was first published in the Roman Catholic quarterly, Continuum, St. Xavier College, Chicago. This paper represents the main ideas of Garaudy as they appear in his book From Anathema to Dialogue, recently published in English.

It was under this title that a Pax Convention was held in Melbourne September 24, 1967, where Roman Catholics discussed questions pertaining to dialogue.

We present here summaries of various papers given at this Convention.

The papers by Fr. Kenny and Fr. Marstin were prepared for the Convention but were not actually delivered. They were, however, made available there, together with the other papers.

IN OUR TIME, the dialogue is an objective necessity. This absolute necessity of dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Communists proceeds from two incontrovertible facts:

1. In this second half of the Twentieth Century, the presently existing stocks of atomic and thermonuclear bombs have made it technically possible to destroy every trace of life on earth. We have now reached the sublime and tragic moment in human history, in which the human epic begun a million years ago could well come to an end. If mankind is to survive, it will not do so merely through the force of the inertia of biological evolution, but rather through a human decision which requires, as Teilhard de Chardin has so admirably said: “the common effort of all those who believe that the universe is still progressing, and that we are in charge of this progress.”

2. The second incontrovertible fact is that on this earth, this vessel floating in space with three billion men aboard, which dissension in the crew could scuttle at any moment, there are two great conceptions of the world: hundreds of millions of human beings find in a religious belief the meaning of their life and of their death, the meaning of human history itself, and for hundreds of millions of others it is Communism which shapes the hopes of the world and gives meaning to our history. This, then, is an incontrovert-
The future of mankind cannot be built in opposition to those with a religious faith, nor even without them; the future of mankind cannot be built in opposition to the Communists, nor even without them.

Father Gonzales Ruiz distinguishes two levels for such a dialogue: the level of the concept of man, and the level of politics. Such a distinction seems quite legitimate to me and the connection of the two problems appears equally legitimate. For it is not possible, in such a debate, to set aside the respective concepts of man in order to discuss exclusively political policies. Marxism, like Christianity, will not divorce the treatment of social and political problems from philosophic principles.

A dialogue conceived in such terms is distinctly demanding both with respect to oneself, and with respect to the other. For the encounter, if it is to be more than sporadic or for merely tactical purposes, must engage the very centre of our being. Such a dialogue requires that each partner return to what is fundamental: Both the Christian and the Marxist must abstract what is essential from what is merely historical accident or temporary circumstance; he must abstract that which cannot under any circumstances be subject to compromise. In the course of these last few years, such a reassessment has occurred on both sides, each side sensing the need to return to what is fundamental.

Three of the most important events of our era: the overwhelming development of the natural and technical sciences; the socialist revolutions, which have furnished us with historical evidence that capitalism does not represent the only possible form of social relations in our time, nor even the best form; and the irresistible movements of national liberation amongst nations hitherto colonised, which have created new centres of historical initiative and have revealed sources of human value outside the western tradition. These three major events of our period have considerably enlarged the scope of the human horizon, and, in so doing, have led Christians to a clearer realisation of what aspects of their faith are merely the incidental results of the historic conditions of the birth and development of Christianity, and what aspects of their faith are essential.

The scientific concept of the nature of the world has, in every period, influenced the manner in which men have conceived of God and of their own function in the world. It is for this reason that every period of great progress in the natural sciences has changed man's general view of the world, and, in so doing, has brought forth major religious crises. Starting from this historical insight, Father Teilhard raises the question of a current formulation of the Christian faith which will take into consideration the
changes which have occurred in the world. The conversion of the Church to the hopes of the world requires most certainly a bold initiative:

She must submerge in order to be able to re-emerge and lift up. To participate in order to render sublime. This is the very law of the Incarnation. One day, some thousand years ago, the popes bid farewell to the Roman world, and decided to turn towards the barbarians.

Is not a similar and even more profound gesture appropriate today?

I believe that the world will not be converted to the celestial hopes of Christianity, until Christianity is converted to the hopes of the world to make them divine.

Father Teilhard is never opposed to a faith in something beyond the struggle here on earth.

Taken by itself, faith in the world does not suffice to move the earth forward. On the other hand, however, is it quite certain that, taken by itself, Christian faith is still sufficient to move the world upwards on high?

He even adds:

The synthesis of the Christian God on high with the Marxist God ahead; this is the only God whom we shall in future be able to worship in spirit and in truth.

Never before, perhaps, has the problem of the totality of man been stated as boldly. To achieve thus a concept of Christianity as a “religion of action”, to re-evaluate the world, is not merely an answer to the problem of the relationships of religion and science, but also an answer to the problem of the relationships of Christianity and society.

A concept of Christianity immersed in the world and not divorced from it nor averting itself from it as if the world were unclean, this is not an innovation of our age at all. Side by side with the tradition of the Imitation of Christ, there exists in the Catholic Church a tradition of Christian humanism. Each time that mankind has accomplished decisive progress in the mastery of nature, of society, and of its future, the accent has shifted to this Christian humanism. During the Renaissance, Cardinal Bellermine wrote of “the ascent towards God by the ladder of the creatures.” The extraordinary renaissance of our Twentieth Century has once more brought to life this state of mind, now, however, not merely for a small elite of humanists, but rather for the broad masses of mankind.

The whole history of the Church is informed by this internal dialectic, by this opposition within it of the Constantinian tradition, in which the accent is on the fact of sin, and which serves as a justification for a providential and legitimate state of authority.
leading otherwise incapable men to liberty, and the apocalyptic tradition, which re-appears whenever the masses of the populace become aware of their strength, which places the accent on the fact that God incarnate as Man has triumphed over sin, and which undertakes to inscribe this apocalypse into history. The Constantinian tradition sanctifies the dominion of class over class, confirming slavery, serfdom and dependence on wages; it aligns the Church in solidarity with this dominion. The apocalyptic tradition, on the other hand inspired the rebellion of John Huss as well as the more recent colonial heresies. The most profound significance of the movement towards an “aggiornamento”* is perhaps that, under the pressure of the changed conditions of human existence in the Twentieth Century, the apocalyptic pole in the Church gains ground at the expense of the Constantinian pole.

Christianity stimulates historic creativity by its indication of the merely provisional character of every historic present, and participates with all its power in the full realisation of man, because it is through this full realisation that man can encounter God. Such an attitude permits us now to place the dialogue on a new and higher level. It is on this level that Father Gonzales Ruiz, writing in the organ of the Catholic Youth Movement of Spain, raises the question:

Socialism has brought more justice into the world than the old social structures. The human meaning of work, the suppression of the social classes, the building of socialism ... a serious and faithful confrontation of ideas becomes necessary on all these points.

It is remarkable that the return to what is fundamental was begun, for Marxist philosophers as for Christians, by a new study of the sources in order to discover what was specifically Marxist in the materialism of their doctrine, what Marx had brought to philosophy which was radically new.

This movement of reflection places us at the heart of our subject, for the majority of theoretical misunderstandings between Christians and Marxists come from a great confusion even about the word “materialism.”

What distinguishes Marxism from all earlier forms of materialism is that Marxism takes the creative act of man as its point of departure. In his Theses on Feuerbach Marx underlines this radical difference:

* Aggiornamento: Bringing up to date, modernising.
It is remarkable that in this text, generally rightly considered as the birth of Marxist philosophy, seven theses out of eleven are directly devoted to disengaging the various aspects of this creative act of man:

The active side of knowledge;
the criterion of practice, as the only criterion of truth;
the task of philosophy defined as transforming the world.

The Faustian primacy of action in Marx evokes the Fichtean and Hegelian origins of his philosophy. "The grandeur of Hegel's Phenomenology" (writes Marx in his Manuscripts of 1844) "lies in the fact that he conceives of man as the result of his own work." This will become the cornerstone of Marx's conception of socialism: "For the man of socialism, all that we call universal history, is nothing more than the birth of man by human work."

The moment of creation, and with it, the moment of subjectivity and that of transcendence, of going beyond what is given, are essentials in Marxism. Marxist humanism, if it lies, as Marx insisted, beyond all that is merely negative in atheism, is not disinterested in the questions men ask about the meaning of their life and of their death, about the problem of their origins and of their ends, on the exigencies of their thought and of their hearts.

The Marxist ask himself the same questions as the Christian, the same exigencies are at work for him, he lives in the same state of future-directedness, but — and here lies the difference — he does not believe himself to be authorized — because Marxism is a critical and not a dogmatic philosophy — to transform his question into an answer, his exigency into a presence. "Ever active spirit, how I feel you!" wrote Goethe, and Marxism, with its Faustian and Fichtean inspiration, does not yield to the temptation of affirming the existence, behind the act, of a being which is its source. My thirst is no proof of the existence of a spring. The infinite is for the Marxist both absence and exigency, for the Christian both promise and presence.

Here there is incontestably a divergence between the Promethean view of liberty as creation, and the Christian conception of grace and consent. Transcendence is for the Christian the act of God coming towards him and calling to him. It is to the Marxist an act of man overreaching himself towards his remote being.

I believe that Marxist atheism only takes from man the illusion of certitude and that Marxist dialectic, lived out to the full, is in the end richer in infinity and more exigent than Christian transcendence. Besides, it is probably only like this because it bears in itself the wonderful Christian heritage, and because it owes it to itself to question it still further: living Marxism, which has
proved its fertility and effectiveness in history, in political economy, in the revolutionary struggles of the building of socialism, owes it to itself, in terms of philosophy, to elaborate in more profound fashion a theory of transcendence which is not alienated. In this search, Christianity has much to teach us, and it would be a tragedy of history and a great waste of time for mankind if the dialogue between Christians and Marxists, their cooperation for mutual enrichment and for the common building of the future, of the city of man, of the complete man, were to be vitiated for much longer, perhaps because of the dead hand of the past.

A thousand years of strife exist between us. There is no way to get rid of it without facing it squarely. A balance-sheet of our complaints has been drawn up in Marx’s lapidary phrase of 1843: “Religion is the opium of the people.” The question is worth asking: “Judging from a purely historical and sociological point of view, has religion been and is it the opium of the people?”

The teaching of the Church in its official form and for the greater part of its history since Constantine, has put the brake on or fought against the struggles of the oppressed by placing the conquest of justice, liberty and happiness in another world, by lending the legitimacy of divine right to the established order and by teaching resignation to exploitation and oppression. To go no further than the experience of the West, the masters of Christian thought have legitimized all class dominations: slavery, serfdom and dependence on wages.

The fundamental thesis is developed in all its generality by Pope Pius X on the 18th December, 1903:

Human society, as God established it, is composed of unequal elements. Consequently, it is appropriate to the order established by God that human society have princes and subjects, owners and workers, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, nobles and members of the lower classes.

Obviously a social doctrine founded on resignation to one’s lot flows from this thesis. The encyclical *Quadragessimo Anno* (1931) advances this conclusion explicitly: “Workers should accept the place which divine providence has allotted them without complaint.”

Is that as much as to say that religion is only the opium of the people? With the same force, we reply: No. The Marxist conception of religion cannot reduce itself and does not reduce itself to this summary formula. The thesis according to which religion, in all times and in all places, turns man away from action, from struggles and from work, is in flagrant contradiction with historical reality. This thesis was never Marx’s. In the very next text where the famous formula “religion is the opium of the people”
is found, Marx, a few lines later, underlines the fact that Christianity "is, on the one hand the expression of real distress and, on the other, protest against real distress." Here is the first dialectical approach to religious fact. This dialectical conception alone allows us to understand the history of Christianity while distinguishing at each stage, reflection and protestation, opium and stimulant, faith and ideology, the moment of Constantine and the moment of the apocalypse, existential exigency and its alienation.

The acute sense of opening to the future has thus degenerated in vulgar apologetics, into an attempt to slide faith into the temporary cracks of knowledge and to demean the idea of God so that he becomes, in Fr. Durbarle's expression, "the little supplement to our intellectual insufficiencies." It was against this sort of thing that Teilhard de Chardin reacted with violence.

Efforts of this kind, more and more frequent in our time, help Marxists to become aware of the blessed illusion, left as a legacy to the proletariat by the 18th century in France (which radically misunderstood the specificity of religious fact), that a good scientific propaganda would finish off religion. Science helps to make superstition, magic and myth recede.

Does science touch upon the fundamental in religion? We do not believe that it does. The crucial debate between Christians and atheists is not located on a scientific plane, but on a moral plane. There is, however, a profound split between Christians and Marxists, and it is important to place it exactly in perspective.

For us Marxists, faith in our task does not presuppose any reference to the presence of and appeal to a God. The previous success of thought and action in the humanization of nature and the humanization of history give us enough strength, we think, to continue the human epic which began more than a million years ago. We freely admit that there is a risk in acting on this certitude, since no one and nothing guarantees us victory in advance. But it is also true that no one and nothing lets us assert that this guarantee exists.

Faith in God makes the Christian live as consent the life we live as creation, although for both parties it is an opening onto the future, a self-transcendence. The certitudes which we postulate at the end of our effort are postulated by the Christian at its source. But the fact remains that both parties live out the same tension. And what is important is that the completely human faith in our task should not rob man of any of the dimensions historically conquered from the starting-point of faith in God, and that faith in a transcendent Deity should never limit or put brakes on faith in the human task.
Any other divergence is not a religious divergence. Any polemic on the institution, as for example on the social role of the Church or the behaviour of socialist states or communist parties is political and historical discussion. Any polemic on religious ideology and Marxist theory is scientific and philosophical discussion.

At the ideological and institutional level two human plans confront each other and can mutually enrich each other, and the problem of atheism and faith can constitute neither a precondition nor an exclusive condition. It is no doubt for Christians to say what Marxism brings to them, so that their very faith may be incarnate in historical reality and become an effective force in the struggle to create the political and social conditions for the realization of the complete man. But, as Marxists, we cannot possibly evade the search for what Marxism itself, as a world-view at the basis of a methodology of historical initiative, owes to Christianity as the religion of the absolute future and to what it has brought to the exploration of two essential dimensions of man: those of subjectivity and transcendence.

This is the surest basis for dialogue, the best guarantee of its faithfulness: the profound certainty that if each of us recognizes what is fundamental in his certitudes, he will discover, the one by his faith in God, the other by his faith in the human task, a common willingness to stretch man’s creative energies to the maximum in the direction of the realization of the complete man, and he will recognize the mutual enrichment which will result from dialogue, from cooperation and emulation between the Marxist’s Promethean humanism and the humanism of the Christian.

To be fertile, this dialogue must be demanding. The worst danger would be that of idealizing it, that is to say of believing that all other problems have been solved and that a dialogue among a few disincarnate “well-meaning souls” will bring the world salvation—that is, unity. Let us be quite sure about the fact that we are as yet only on the verge of a great turning-point in the human epic, which will only be truly passed when we move from the meeting of a small number of isolated pathfinders, who are sometimes suspect in their own communities, to a real dialogue among the communities themselves.

But on both sides, the obstacles and the misunderstandings will only be removed by our going over from anathema to dialogue. For our part we accept and desire this dialogue with all our strength. We offer a dialogue without precondition or exclusive condition. We do not ask anyone to stop being what he is, but on the contrary we ask him to be it more fully and to be it better. We hope that our interlocutors would formulate the same stricture for us.
Denis Kenny

“While rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live. Such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue.”

Vatican II.

IT SEEMS that the prevailing attitude of Catholics to communists and communism has been sub-rational and sub-Christian. Sub-rational first of all, because it is often generated by ignorance. Sub-Christian, secondly because it entails a refusal to understand, to sympathize, and to forgive. The challenge to understand many of the intricacies of communist theory and the devious and tortuous paths of communist policy is difficult: it is also difficult to sympathize with many of the means used by communist regimes and to forgive the violence, the destruction, the suppression of civil and religious liberties that they have perpetrated. But we must remember that loving enemies and forgiving persecutors though not part of their official platform is essential to ours.

The Four Phases of Dialogue

There are four phases in this task of developing the appropriate basic attitude for dialogue. Most of these are concerned with removal of ignorance, of mistaken impressions and with the need to understand. If this task is successful, some barriers will be broken down and some obstacles to peace removed. You will recall Christ’s injunction to remove the beam from your own eye before you attempt to remove the mote from your brother’s! Initially it is difficult to say which of the two parties is afflicted with the beam and which with the mote. Only history will tell.

Phase One: Motives

The first phase in the removal of beams is that of understanding the motivation of communists. Almost invariably communists are accused of seeking world domination. This is a slander for it is not what they claim to seek. Communists seek the emancipation of the exploited classes of the world. This is a rather different ambition, and one with which a Church, which claims to be the church of the poor, should feel some sympathy. The aim in using the catch cry that communists seek world domination is that they are more easily identified with a Nazi style ideology and it conjures up fears of the consequences of appeasement and compromise. A task for Australian Catholics therefore, is a thorough
investigation of the fundamental communist aim. The shift in focus and emphasis away from world domination to that of concern about the two-thirds of the world which is in thrall to ignorance and poverty, brings with it a greater possibility for mutual understanding.

Phase Two: Foreign Policy

The second phase in the removal of beams concerns the field of international affairs and foreign policy. In this we have to become more acutely aware of the defects of foreign policy with which Australia has been associated. There is an increasing volume of evidence that the West and especially the USA have been to some extent responsible for the generation of cold war tensions; we have been subjected to twenty years of partisan propaganda in the interests of a capitalist political ideology and often this propaganda has been taken up and amplified by the Catholic press and the popular religious magazines and periodicals. There is a tendency to ridicule and denigrate the positive achievements of communist regimes; a failure to recognize and appreciate that in a country like China these regimes have succeeded in a short period of time when all the western nations seemed capable of was destruction and exploitation.

It is important to appreciate that there is a discernible difference between revolution and violent revolution. There is some evidence to believe that the social and economic problems of the under-developed countries of the world can be solved only as a consequence of a radical reorganisation of the present social and economic structures. Christian charity could demand—and this is something that would have to be frankly and thoroughly investigated—that we support revolution as the one hope of the redemption of Asia from chronic poverty, yet insure, by the influence that our support gives us with a communist regime, and by a willingness to give sanctuary to reactionary refugees, that violence is reduced to the minimum. Our present policy insures that we often effectively frustrate the implementation of needed reforms at the maximum cost in violence and bloodshed.

Phase Three: Religion

The third phase in the removal of beams is an attempt to understand the profoundly atheistic and anti-religious strain in communism and the consequent suppression of religious freedom by communist regimes. The difficulty is that Christians naturally tend to see their Church in the best light and usually have a rather limited historical perspective and consciousness. They are
usually unaware of the abysmal impotence of Christians in general to cope with the gross injustices of the industrial revolution. They are usually unaware that Christianity became, or at least appeared to become an instrument of exploitation by the industrial capitalists of the industrial proletariat. To Marx and the communists religion was sapping the creative potential of the masses to rise above poverty and throw off the yoke of social injustice. Even in the emerging nations, Christianity often appeared part of the whole process of western imperialistic domination and not infrequently the Christian missionaries invoked the military power of the west in the interests of religion.

We need to recall Christ's warning that not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter his kingdom. He insisted that the essential qualification was a willingness to do the will of His Father. There can be no doubt that the economic reform and development of the world is, today, part of this.

Catholics and Christians generally are profoundly disturbed by the militant atheism of some communist regimes. In many cases this is incompatible with the atheism of Marx himself about which the leading Catholic German theologian Johann Baptist Metz says:

Marxism does not appear primarily as a world-design for existence against God, but as the offer of a possibility of existence, a total humanity without God. Thematic atheism is thus truly not an object but a presupposition of Marxism . . . it is here, I believe, that the possibility of responsible conversation and exchange offers itself. Christianity must take this humanitarian claim at its word and let its own solidarity in the struggle for the humanity of man be recognised — and this more decisively than ever. The threatened man: he could be the place where the truth of belief and unbelief is today tested and manifested. (Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 4, No. 2, P. 233).

The conflict between belief and unbelief will be resolved in the crucible of historical reality where the results are chalked up. Remember Christ's remark about inductive criteria: By their fruits you shall know them. In the early 19th century, the results showed a victory to the great religious orders of charity. In the twentieth century, the communist dialectic appears to be triumphing.

Many Christians have not yet faced an important fact of twentieth century life. As Stanley Windass says in an essay "Living with Communism: Creeds in Dialogue" (Peace on Earth: The Way Ahead, ed. Walter Stein, p. 119).

The fact has to be faced that communism is the most dynamic creed to take possession of men's minds since the mediaeval papacy proclaimed its ideal of a universal Christian monarchy. It is a creed which has already taken possession,
in one way or another, of half the population of the world, and which shows no sign of having run its course; and while it must be admitted that there are some countries where the communist regime lacks popular support and may be expected to ‘crumble’ in appropriate circumstances (we all think of East Germany) there is little doubt that in most countries where it is established, communism is sufficiently rooted in the loyalties of the people to stand up to storm and tempest, whether material or spiritual. If we are concerned, therefore with the unity of the human race, we have indeed to live with communism; this is a marriage from which there is no divorce.

Phase Four: Affinities

The fourth and more positive phase in the developing of an attitude of dialogue is that of seeking affinities between the Christianity of the New Testament and the positive values and insights of communism. The claim of the Catholic New Left in England is that there is greater compatibility between the spirit of the last supper and the Marxist vision of the international community of the classless society based on co-operative ownership and endeavour, than there is between Christianity and a society which is radically competitive and consumer oriented.

The appeal of the New Left is to the early Marx, and they claim that communism requires the same kind of “aggiornamento” which the Catholic Church has subjected itself to, in order to slough off the institutions and ideological accretions which have disguised and even eliminated many of the human and personal values Marx wished to champion.

It is not intended, of course, to gloss over the profound misgivings, which Christians may inevitably have about marxism whether these be philosophical, historical or economic. Many dedicated marxists themselves are realizing that marxism in all its dimensions must be treated as an hypothesis to be modified as new empirical data, not available to Marx, come to light. The important point is, however, that no matter how implausible marxism may be as a political or economic theory or as a philosophical system, the fact remains that it is the ideological dynamic which effectively controls half the world and as such must be reckoned with. It cannot be smugly discounted because of some real or imagined logical inconsistency in its basic metaphysical structure.

Communist-Catholic dialogue at the domestic level

So far I have concentrated on some prevailing attitudes to communism and communists at the international level which can be important factors in generating a violent military response at times of political, social or economic crisis. But Catholic attitudes to communists are important also at the domestic level.
In the first instance, many Catholics still think of communists in Australia as subversive elements, as representatives of a foreign power, and they can reach only too readily for confirmation of this in the writings of Lenin. If the same kind of confirmation is used to substantiate the same kind of slander against Catholics, the latter would want to appeal to more recent ecclesiastical documents to assert and vindicate their patriotism. Yet so far they have shown little willingness to allow recent developments in the communist world to count against the slander of their being subversive elements. Catholics demand the right to be intensely concerned about the fate of Catholics in other parts of the world, but are not willing, generally, to concede this right to Australian communists when they show a similar concern for fellow ideologues in other parts of the world. It is beyond doubt, that in the past, Australian communists have been guilty of subversion. But there are still people in Australia who would want to lay the same charge at the door of certain elements in the Catholic Church, for their political activities in the not so distant past.

What we now have to accept is that times have changed and brought in a new set of circumstances and a new set of problems.

Catholics in Australia would like their fellow citizens to be familiar with the Vatican II document on the Church In The Modern World and with the Declaration of Religious Freedom. I should imagine that Australian communists would want their fellow citizens to be familiar with the Documents of their 21st National Party Congress held recently, especially when it states:

The building of a mass Communist Party requires that communists break decisively with dogmatic attitudes and develop policy, theory, organisation and activity that accords with the requirements of contemporary Australian life in all its aspects.

In the Vatican Council, Catholics embarked on a process of rigorous self-examination and self-criticism. The same kind of process is gaining strength among communists.

The fact is that there have been radical changes in the theory and practice of the Australian Communist Party—a process of adaptation and renewal. An ignorance of the changes can have serious political consequences for Australia. To the extent that sub-rational attitudes and fears about communism in Australia prevail, then to that extent a whole area of the political spectrum comes under interdict; a whole area of political activity, a whole range of attitudes and policies is disqualified from rational consideration and becomes anathema because it is "left." This results in a weakening of our political structure, for it limits the choice
of policy options and the range of rational possibilities by auto-
matically excluding any which happen to be espoused by the
communists. People with these sub-rational attitudes, therefore,
contract out of the arena in which democratic influence can be
exercised and expose themselves to ruthless political exploitation,
with an inevitable, though scarcely discernible erosion of civil
liberties.

Catholics have the self imposed task of being the agents of
reconciliation and unity among men, not as a remotely religious
but as an immediate task. This task is not fulfilled if we are
preferred simply to tolerate or coexist with communists in the
Australian society. It is fulfilled only in and through the practical
steps which are taken to assimilate groups. This process of assimil­
ation will be achieved not by a cloying and condescending exer­
cise in charity nor by feckless bonhomie. It can result only from
a sincere attempt to understand and co-operate.

If we have to look for one area of mutual concern, to the best
opportunity for united action in Australia between Catholics and
communists, it is that of poverty, social inequality and economic
injustice. Anyone with any knowledge of communists would have
to concede to them a fundamental, sometimes even a fanatical
concern for poverty, a sensitivity to injustice in all its forms and
a dedication to doing something about it. Not without some
justification, Catholics and Christians generally fear that these
pathological social situations have occasionally been exploited by
communists in the interests of furthering their domestic and for­
eign policies. Nevertheless, at the core of communism is this con­
cern for the poor, the underprivileged and the exploited. Com­
munists today, in Australia, regard themselves as a leaven, as a
social irritant, and in this role they are not far from Catholics
who in the Vatican Council proclaimed themselves officially as
"the Church of the poor and the oppressed.”

Yet there is the danger, in Australia, that affluence in the
Catholic Church makes a mockery of this claim. As Johann Baptist
Metz points out, it is not enough merely to make this claim as a
merely religious, theoretical and theological escape from the
Church’s historical responsibility to the poor. It would be insidious
if this claim was allowed to remain merely pious rhetoric. The
various Catholic religious orders and organisations such as the
St. Vincent de Paul Society do magnificent work for the poor,
but one could not claim, in Australia, that the Catholic Church
is altogether credibly the Church of the poor and oppressed. In­
deed, in the interests of its many institutional commitments, it
tends to join the ranks of the exploiters. When the Catholic Church
announces itself as “the Church of the poor and the oppressed,”
it poses itself with the challenge of “Put up or shut up.”

The question that Catholics have to ask themselves is whether
Christ would have been more at home with the atheistic materialists of the right who dominate modern society in their own interests or with the atheistic materialists of the left who seek, through revolution, the emancipation of the underprivileged and the exploited.

The major difficulty with co-operation with communists in
Australia is that the Communist Party is basically a political party
and shares the defects common to all political parties, among them, the tendency to make political capital out of any project which can rebound to its credit. Consequently, while many Catholics can see the need to break down many of the sub-rational barriers which stand at the moment, and while they can see that co-operation in achieving worthwhile objectives is one of the most effective ways of doing this, nevertheless, the problem of avoiding further difficulties and of generating deeper conflicts and antipathies in the Australian community as a consequence of this co-operation has yet to be solved.

Conclusion

The consequence of the line of reasoning I have been advocating is not to recommend communism or marxism. The consequence is rather that some of the sub-rational and sub-Christian obstacles to a human attitude to a world-wide and challenging ideology will be removed. Where ignorance and fear prevail world peace is in danger and the chances of an adequate human and Christian response to the problems for which communism claims to have the solution are frustrated.

At the moment an anti-communist phobia is an important factor in blinding many Christians to the evil which is the war in Vietnam. This phobia has rendered even the word “peace” an object of suspicion. Ignorance of communist objectives and achievements, ignorance of the failures of the colonial powers in the underdeveloped countries, fear of the horrors which communism is thought inevitably to bring in its train and a repudiation of the violence which we inextricably associate with communist revolution, have provoked us to endorse, in Vietnam, the infliction of bloodshed and violence of which the Viet Cong would be technically incapable; they have provoked us to endorse, in Australia, the erosion of political freedoms which even the communists deplore.
Throughout the western world Catholics can still be relied on, even by those who in most respects are insidiously un-Christian, to be intransigently anti-communist. In most ways this has been the factor which has accommodated the Catholic Church to an otherwise alien culture. But in Australia this characteristic has led us actively to support what could prove to be one of the most unjust, one of the most violent and one of the most futile military adventures in modern history. When at long last the Vietnamese are left to settle their own destiny Christians in Australia may realise with anguish and remorse that once again the Church has, at least tacitly, endorsed the use of might and violence in the service of right, in the cause of some sacred and abstract ideal, at the expense of the suffering and death of hundreds of thousands of human beings.

The fundamental Christian stance is not “anti-” anything or anyone. For Catholics to be known as profoundly anti-communist is a slur, and to the extent that it is justified then Catholics are untrue to the Church’s own description of itself in Vatican II. A more authentic Christian image is described by Bishop Huyghe of Boulogne in France:

That man is a Catholic who opens himself to all . . . He is a Catholic who . . . becomes . . . overwhelmed by distress, whatever form that distress may take. He is a Catholic who instinctively rejects everything that is a source of division, who cannot meet anyone without tirelessly seeking out an area of agreement. He is a Catholic who sees in each man not . . . the label which is applied to him, of unbeliever, or Protestant or Jew or communist, but the brother for whom Christ died, and who has been placed in his path in order to receive his love.

Dr. Leo Clareborough

The Genesis of the Cold War — Do We Share Responsibility?

The co-operative spirit of Yalta seems to have been broken more by the West than by the USSR in the period 1945-47. Thus it was recognised at Yalta that only governments friendly to Russia would be acceptable in Eastern European states, yet there seemed an unwillingness to accept pro-communist governments in Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania. Did the West really believe at Yalta that western style democratic governments were to be the rule in Russian occupied Eastern European states? Compromise solutions reached on Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania were recognised as appeasement.

There was a reluctance on the part of the West to accept a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe despite the active building
by America of a sphere of influence in the Pacific. Other factors which point to the conclusion that the West does share the responsibility for The Cold War are:

1 The strong allied antagonism to the Russian revolutionary government at the end of World War I. Stalin's reply to Churchill's Fulton speech indicates that this factor was contributing to Russian attitudes. It would appear that Western attitudes, particularly on the part of America, to communist governments, were potentially more antagonistic after World War II than after World War I. It is possible that this potential may not have developed as it did if diplomats of the calibre of Roosevelt and Hopkins had survived longer.

2 The abrupt termination of Lend-Lease Aid to Russia.

3 Clear lack of co-operation by America with her Russian ally at the time of the atom bombing of Japan.

4 The failure of the West to take due account of what appear to have been sincere Russian worries concerning her safety from attack by the West, particularly in relation to the devastation suffered by Russia in the war, and the American possession of the atomic bomb.

Dr. Max Charlesworth

Conditions of Dialogue between Catholics and Communists

If there is to be dialogue between Catholics and communists, both must be prepared to spell out what they can learn from each other. This presupposes that communists are willing to distinguish between the ideals, good intentions and essential values that Christianity represents, and the abuses and distortions that those values and ideals have suffered at the hands of individual Christians in the past. Catholics have a right to ask communists to judge the Church, not on its record in, say the Inquisition or the nineteenth century when (so most Catholics would admit) the essence of Catholicism was distorted and betrayed, but rather on its record in Vatican II.

Equally, if Catholics wish to undertake dialogue with communists, they must be prepared to discern between the essential values of communism and the historical abuses of those values, as for example in the Stalinist era or the present phase of Maoism. If communism is seen as being on a par with nazism, with its racism and totalitarianism, then any attempt at dialogue would be futile. (This is in fact the way in which a good many Catholics, in Australia at least, view communism at the present time. For
them there is no possibility of distinguishing between the ideals of communism and its historical abuses, in the same way as they could claim this is possible with regard to Catholicism. For them the abuses of communism are simply the outward symptoms of the intrinsically anti-human and anti-Christian essence of communism.) If however communism is seen as a movement that does enshrine certain human and social values despite the terrible distortions that it has been subject to in most communist regimes over the last fifty years, then dialogue is possible.

Some crucial points on which dialogue ought to bear:

1. Do communists necessarily claim a kind of “infallibility” for their position, or are they willing to admit, as Catholics now do regarding Catholic doctrine, the possibility of “development” within Marxism-Leninism?

2. Are communists committed to an “error has no rights” position so that in a communist society those with non-marxist views would have no strict right to propagate them, but at best be allowed freedom for their views on grounds of expediency? Put another way, are Communists committed to a “confessional” view of society, so that the State espouses marxist ideology as the official “creed” and, accordingly, penalises non-marxists? Or can communists admit the possibility and even desirability of a “pluralist” society i.e. a society where non-marxist groups are allowed the same equal rights before the law as marxist groups? The Catholic Church has now given up the “error has no rights” view and the confessional view of society and welcomes the idea of pluralism. (See Vatican II Declaration on Religious Freedom); but many Catholics have the idea that the communists are still, on these matters, where they, the Catholics, were before Vatican II.

3. Are communists committed to violence and class warfare as necessary means of social evolution? Are communists committed to the Leninist view of the Party?

Brian Stanfield

The Church, Communism and Revolution

The success of communism underlined the failure of the Christian Church. In the nineteenth century the socio-economic structure posed an inhuman threat to all but a certain privileged class. The proletariat was large, poor, hungry, diseased, ill-housed and overworked. Some voices in the Church were raised in protest
but the Church on the whole tended to preach contentedness and to take the side of the capitalists and of the established order.

The Church thus became alienated from the working class. Karl Marx was left to fill the vacuum and to father “social thinking.” It was not the churches of the time that rose up in defence of the most elementary rights of man, but the Marxists, socialists and communists. It was for Marx to make the discovery that only a radical break-up of the socio-economic structure could put an end to the miseries of the proletariat. Despite the deficiencies and the inhumanities of extreme Marxism, there were major positive values in Marxism to which the Christianity of the nineteenth century ought to have been open and to which the Church today must be receptive. Marxism was and still is a terrible indictment of a “churchified,” remote, middle-class, laissez-faire Christianity.

If we identify communism with the devil, we should question whether this particular devil has not been conjured up by the errors and shortcomings of Christianity itself. Instead of being God’s avant-garde in the extension of a kingdom of justice, freedom and peace, the Church has far too often been content to be His rearguard.

Today the plight of the so-called Third World with its proclivity for reactionary, right-wing regimes, the hopeless maladministration of land, the resulting hunger, disease, homelessness and despair of the poor, all cry to Heaven for vengeance. Revolution is rapidly replacing passive acceptance. The danger is that Western civilisation, in particular the United States, will see such necessary revolutions as imperilling its own interests, and view them as examples of communist revolution leading to world conquest.

Do the vital interests of the United States require it to ensure that no country in the alleged free world adopts, by whatever means, a communist form of government? If that assumption remains unchallenged, then the present UN involvement in the internal policies of scores of countries can be justified; the Bay of Pigs can be justified; the destruction of Lumumba can be justified; the invasion of the Dominican Republic can be justified, as can be as many plots and counterplots, lies, murders and aggressive acts as the intelligence and military establishments may find necessary to arrest the spread of communism.

The problem of our age is not how to stop, fight or eradicate communism. It is how to cope with its challenge and its appeals in such a way that the competing systems of the planet may produce more benefits to mankind than threats and suffering. A means to this end is the Christianisation of Marxist values and radicalisation of the drive for social justice in the deprived countries.
Ron Marstin

RECENT YEARS have seen a radical change in theology from a static body of propositions about God and man to an investigation of a God who is progressively being realised in the world, and of a mankind in a state of constant evolution. The Church is changing into an “incarnational” Church, living in and for the world of men. Such a Church is necessarily a dynamic, changing Church, and so too is its theology in continual flux and development.

Christianity arose at a time when the world was conceived as a static whole, and in succeeding centuries, it reflected the limitations of its age, becoming less and less relevant to the problems of men, turning more and more from this world to the next, upholding the status quo and teaching resignation in the face of exploitation and oppression.

But in recent times, this static, absolute theology has been challenged more and more widely, so that the centre of Christian concern is shifting back to man and this world. Thus the second Vatican Council states: “Everything we have said about the dignity of the human person, and about the human community and the profound meaning of human activity, lays the foundation for the relationship between the Church and the world, and provides the basis for dialogue between them.”

As a result, Christians are coming to see the task of man not in terms of passive resignation, but as the active planning of the world’s future, the progressive liberation of man from the domination of nature, and the differentiation of social structures to provide the maximum freedom for all people.

Since Vatican II the Church is committed to a dialogue with the world. Integral to this “aggiornamento” are changes in the Church’s attitude to communism. In *Pacem in Terris* Pope John wrote (in a context which made it clear that he was referring to communism): “who can deny that these movements, insofar as they conform to the dictates of right reason, and are interpreters of the lawful aspirations of the human person, contain elements that are positive and deserving of approval?”

Theology is no longer concerned merely with the definition of absolute truths. It is no longer bound to rigid, immutable conceptions of the world. It is a theology of progress, of continual development—of the progress of science, of the development of a new society. Change, moreover, has not been limited to the Christian side. Marxism is experiencing an “aggiornamento” of its own. Communism, which, as a closed ideology, has long offered its own dogmatic answers to the questions men ask about the
meaning of their life and their death, is itself becoming much more open. In this regard, Garaudy maintains that Marx has been misunderstood. Marx acknowledged no ultimate goal of the world, and consequently marxism remains an open system. Communism does not regard itself as the final movement of history, but sees its own domination as the eve of man's liberation. Marxists are coming to realise that there is much of value which they need to assimilate from the Christian heritage. Garaudy has written:

We neither despise nor criticise the Christian for his faith, his love, his dreams, his hopes. Our own task is to labor and to struggle, lest they remain eternally distant or illusory. Our task as Communists is to draw near to man in his most glorious dreams and his most sublime hopes, to draw near to him in a real and practical way, so that Christians themselves might find here on earth a beginning of their heaven.

Marxism is asking the same questions as Christianity does and, if it rejects the Christian's answers to these questions, then this is not because it provides dogmatic answers of its own, but because it insists on remaining wholly open to the future, a future which is open on the infinite. Marxists share with Christians the experience of the inadequacy of all relative and partial being. So far from believing that this search can be enough for man, contemporary marxists envisage a transformation of the earth which implies not only its social and technical re-organisation, and the institution of new economic and political relationships among men, but which is also a profound spiritual metamorphosis of man. “This new frontier of hominisation, making of every man a man, questioning and creative, will mark a new detachment from the earth. (This detachment) will free the spiritual energies of each man and of all men with such force that it is absolutely impossible for us who are caught in the alienations of our pre-history—to imagine their nature and their use.” Here is absolute openness to the future, to the infinite, to transcendence. Here again is the invitation for co-operation with marxists—a co-operation in the building of the future, the realisation of the complete man, the rising above the domination of the past. After we eliminate what is accidental, both to Christianity and to marxism, we find our common ground; ground on which we can construct together the common city and the future of a man who lacks none of his dimensions (Marx's “total man”, Teilhard's “entire man”).

If Christians and communists are able to find common ground not only in their concern for humanity, but also in their openness to the absolute future, then it may well come about, as Teilhard de Chardin put it, the only God whom we shall in the future be able to adore will be a synthesis of the (Christian) God of the Above, and the (marxist) God of the Ahead.