

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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contemporary living.*

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We cannot sidestep the issue of poverty. Who are the biblical 'poor' whom God is on the side of? In what sense is he on their side? What does world poverty say to American evangelical affluence? What does it say to the lifestyle of American missionaries? What does it say to our credibility? Are we prepared emotionally, psychologically, and **P. 250** spiritually to minister in a context of poverty? As we face the call for a growing partnership with Third World missions, we must ask if this is realistically possible, given our present standards of affluence in the West.

Closely allied with the challenge of poverty is that of justice. We are told that we must find where God is active in bringing about justice in society and join him in that endeavor. This approach raises a host of problems for evangelicals. But where does the evangelical missionary stand in the struggle for justice? Is justice a World Council of Churches concern only? How does this whole question affect our loyalty to governments, to the status quo? And above all, our loyalty to the gospel of which justice is an integral part? Harvie Conn's new book, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, addresses these issues.<sup>23</sup>

## MISSIONARY TRAINING

Finally, we must ask ourselves whether or not our missionary candidates are being adequately trained for mission in the years ahead. We talk about wholistic mission and wholistic evangelism. What about wholistic education for missions that concerns itself as much with spiritual 'formation' as with intellectual and cognitive development? Will our M.A. and M.Div. programs prepare students for missionary service in the '80s and '90s? Are they going to be viewed as too costly and time-consuming when one can become an instant missionary by going out short-term and thus bypass a lot of the requirements generally thought to be necessary for the career missionary?

These are some of the questions I face as I peer through a knothole-like window from the second floor of the Graham Center and into a confused and needy world. Obviously, they are not mine alone. They appear on the agendas of many a missiological forum. But for my part, I earnestly pray that the future will afford many more opportunities to discuss and strategize concerning them, with my fellow evangelical missiologists.

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# Karl Marx's Negation of Christianity: A Theological Response

Klaus Bockmuehl

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<sup>23</sup> Harvie Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

*Marxism is more than an economic theology; it is a comprehensive way of life—an ideology. In the 100th year anniversary of Karl Marx's death Klaus Bockmuehl looks afresh at Marx's negation of and challenge to Christianity. He argues that Marx's analysis of human alienation must be answered in theory and in practice with the reality of the New Man in society. He calls for self-criticism and a new identity with Christ.*  
(Editor)

Karl Marx, the intellectual father of Marxism, died one hundred years ago. Does this mean that Marxism is dead? Did it die with him? Did it die under the inevitable critical judgment of the next generation? Did Marxism die from the theoretical manipulations and changes made to it by its own disciples? Did it die perhaps from the evidence of its practical application in some parts of the world? Or is Marxism among the 'living faiths and world views', which the World Council of Churches speaks of and does dialogue with?

Some years ago Russian dissidents, upon their arrival in the West, declared that Marxism was dead as an ideology in Soviet Russia. Now the same people seem to have revised judgment, they say: Marxism is deadly.

Indeed, in the past ten years, in the last decade of the century that has passed since the death of Karl Marx, we have witnessed both the military expansion and the ideological advance of Marxism. This is certainly true of the global picture which the Christian, mindful of the Great Commission, should always have before his eyes. It may also become true for North America where Marxist thinking unexpectedly arrives for discussion not from the East, or over the Bering Strait, but from the South, from Latin America, in the company of 'Liberation Theology'.

Today, as we think of Karl Marx' death one hundred years ago, we are, therefore, not just conversing with a figure of past history; we are very much discussing a current concern. Perhaps part of the reason that this is so lies in the fact that Marxism is not just an economic [p. 252](#) theory but a comprehensive philosophy of life, a world view, in short: an ideology. This very quality of Marxism makes it also a critic and competitor of Christianity.

In the following, we shall discuss some of Marxism's basic tenets as they immediately throw a challenge at the Christian faith, under the three headings of Atheism, Humanism, and Communism.

## **PRACTICAL ATHEISM AS SOVEREIGN MAN**

Marx' historical comment, 'Communism begins with Atheism' (3,297) is echoed by the whole structure of his own philosophy.

For Marx, religion is 'an untruth, even if an existing untruth' (3,28). It is the self-alienation of man: 'The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself' (3,272). 'God is all that man is not' (4,160). Religion empties the world of man and transfers its whole contents into the 'fantastic reality of heaven' (3,174). Instead of raising up humanity from its sufferings, religion points it to otherworldly consolations. Thus religion is, if not a lie, then an illusion. It effects only an 'illusory happiness', it is 'the opium of the people' (3,175f.). Moreover, whenever man assumes the existence of another being above himself and nature which he acknowledges to be *ens realissimum*, the most real being; man himself and nature become unreal and unessential. Christianity is the perfection of all religion as the self-estrangement of man (3,173).

One particular Christian doctrine seems to be annoying to Karl Marx: Creation, understood as the Kingdom of God. For him, the concept of creation emphasises the non-essentiality of man. He argues as follows: If I owe not only the maintenance of my life but also its creation and thus my whole existence to the grace of another being, then I cannot

see myself as free and independent (3,304). But man must be free. Therefore, Marx is prepared to contradict the concept of creation, although he thinks it is difficult to eliminate because it seems to be supported by all the palpable evidence of practical life. Nevertheless, he takes up the construct of *generatio aequivoca*, a process of the selfgeneration of the earth, in order to replace the concept of creation. Respectively, he speaks of man's evolutionary selfgeneration through his own work (3,305; 3,342). For, if man had a Creator, he would also have a Lord all along. And that is where the crux lies. Quoting Hamlet's famous line, 'that is the question', Marx sums up the alternative: 'Is God sovereign, or is man? One of the two is an untruth ...' (3,28).

What is to be done? Answer: Not only replace, but reverse the p. 253 creation theory: 'The fundament of all critique of religion is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man' (3,175). 'Criticism of religion disillusion man', so that he regains his senses and 'moves around himself as his own true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself' (3,176). The reversal of the creation theory effects the reestablishment of man as the highest being. God must be removed in order that man might be recovered. For Marx, atheism is necessary for reasons of philanthropy (3,297), of attaining a theoretical as well as practical humanism. Therefore 'Communism begins with atheism'.

Two qualifications have to be made of the atheism of Marx. First, the practical corollary to his atheism is *secularism*. Whereas atheism can be understood as the theoretical denial of the existence of God, secularism describes the respective practical attitude: living and acting as if God did not exist. If atheism is the epistemological decision, secularism is its moral equivalent. Marx intends consistency of atheism, in theory and practice, in thought and life. That could be gleaned already from the sure grip with which he made the question of sovereignty—man's or God's—the foundational question. It is this decision which today makes Marxism the cutting edge of secularism, compared with which Capitalist secularity is still ridden with compromise.

Second, the atheism of Karl Marx is not of the cool, detached species. It is redhot and *passionate*. For Marx, Prometheus, the figure of Greek mythology that stands for rebellion against the gods, is 'the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar'. Marx leaves no doubt that he shares Prometheus' confession: 'In simple words, I hate the pack of gods' (1,3 of.). The titanic posture of Prometheus, the ancient legendary figure, surfaces already in Marx' early poems of 1837 where he invokes the human urge to build his own world, 'to be a creator of the universe himself'.

Marx here seems to participate in the mood of mid-nineteenth century atheism. He comes close to the stance of Michael Bakunin, the father of Anarchism, later his colleague in the 'First International' who prided himself in reversing Voltaire's famous saying 'If God did not exist, one would have to invent Him' into 'If God really existed, one would have to abolish him'. Marx' atheism also resembles the sentiments of Friedrich Nietzsche who makes his Zarathustra say: 'Away with a god! Rather have no god, rather be God yourself!' And in 1888 Nietzsche wrote to a friend: 'The coming years will see the world upside down. After the old God has abdicated, from now on I shall rule the world.' Marx, of course, would have found it absurd to say p. 254 such a thing about himself as an individual; however, in terms of humanity, the proposition fits his mind.

Marx' secularism is charged with the same high-spirited attitude. Marx shows himself confident that the miracles of the gods have been 'rendered superfluous by the miracles of industry' (3,278). He seems to echo the confidence of his mentor Ludwig Feuerbach who felt that in a time of fire insurance companies and steam trains, the God of Providence was no longer needed. The weakness of humanity had been overcome by its own inventions. Humanity was potentially almighty. One remembers similarly euphoric

declarations from the recent phase of another 'God is dead' philosophy which ruled the scene for a short time just before the first oil crisis and before the public became aware of the magnitude of the ecological crisis brought about by man's over-confident regime of nature.

## **NATURE HUMANISM AND THE REAL MAN**

We have already pointed out that, for Marxism, atheism is a presupposition, a means to an aim. The aim is the inthronisation of man as the highest being. That is the overtone of his characterisation of atheism as philanthropy: philanthropy not just in the usual sense of a disposition to charity. Marx actually borrows some of the Old Testament zeal to make his point in an unmistakable fashion: human self-consciousness is the highest divinity, and Marx 'will have none other beside' (1,30).

When Marx here uses the term 'human self-consciousness', he is using the language he used in 1841, the year of the completion of his doctoral dissertation. This was before he absorbed the naturalist humanism of Ludwig Feuerbach who also furnished him with the mature form of his criticism of religion. Marx' praise for Feuerbach includes a hint of his own change of perspective, from an emphasis on 'human self-consciousness' to the espousal of 'real man'. Marx says about Feuerbach that he 'was the first to complete the criticism of religion', as he dissolved the 'metaphysical Absolute Spirit' of Hegel's idealism into 'real man on the basis of nature' (4,139). Not the Absolute Spirit, as Hegel held, nor some mythical Lady History is the subject of world events, but 'real, living man'. From this new vantage point even the term 'human self-consciousness' which Marx had then borrowed from his radical Young-Hegelian friend Bruno Bauer and given prominence in his doctoral dissertation, was an abstraction that needed to be sent back to its source: real, empirical man in his constant correlation with nature. [p. 255](#)

The humanist stance must therefore be qualified as 'real humanism'. Man cannot be understood correctly if his material living conditions, e.g. 'his vulgar body which may live deep down in an English cellar or at the top of a French block of flats' (4,80) are left out of the account. If we are to do justice to man, Marx argues against his former colleague Bruno Bauer, we must, besides idealistic good will, 'demand ... very tangible, very material conditions' (4,95). Mere thinking does not change 'practical debasement', and 'the workers in the Manchester or Lyons workshops ... are most painfully aware of the difference between being and thinking, between consciousness and life' (4,53).

The same is true for human life in general. Man is part of nature, a nature being, and vice-versa, 'Nature is man's larger inorganic body', 'with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die' (3,276). It is therefore utterly inadequate to consider man apart from his bodily, natural existence. This is what Marx means when he speaks of 'materialism' or 'naturalism' as necessary qualifications of the concept of humanism. This perspective will later be enlarged to the theory of 'historical materialism' which postulates the recognition of economic forces as the 'basis', and as decisive for the development of the 'superstructure' of culture: politics, law, religion, the arts etc.

At this point, the very stance of Marxism is again consciously held in criticism of Christianity. Not only has Christianity, as Marx said earlier, made man secondary to God, but its whole idea of man is idealistic, corrupted by other-worldliness. Christianity is the energy behind the reductionism that characterises the concept of man in the philosophy of idealism. The cue here is what Marx holds to be the basic Christian 'dogma of the antithesis between Spirit and Matter, between God and the World' (4,85). Any philosopher who substitutes 'spirit' or 'mind' for real, individual man, reiterates at bottom the Christian position which declares 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth

nothing'. It is this very attitude which makes Christianity the pinnacle of 'the theoretical estrangement of man from himself and from nature' (3,173). Correspondingly, Marx and Engels state in the opening sentence of their book of 1845, 'The Holy Family': 'Real humanism therefore has no more dangerous enemy than this spiritualism' (4,7) which in another place they predicate as 'theological inhumanity' (4,93).

If Christian theology and idealistic philosophy are the theory of human self-alienation and estrangement from nature, they must also in effect become the sanction and legitimation of all practical, empirical, corporeal alienations of man, and a decisive obstacle to their proposed removal. It is for this reason that the criticism of religion precedes and p. 256 accompanies the critique of the practical debasements of man, the critique of politics and economics.

On both counts, then, in theory and in practice, Marx spells out the total loss of humanity which must be countered by a total recovery of man (3,186) from its religious, economic and political estrangements. Presently, humanity—above all the working class—has a semblance of human existence only, but the reality of an inhuman existence (4,36). It is the victim of a contradiction between true human nature on the one hand and a perverted practical life situation on the other. Therefore, according to Marx, whoever believes in man as the highest being for man, must also vouch for man's 'liberation' (3,187), for 'the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being ...' (3,182). That would be real, practical humanism.

## FINAL COMMUNISM AS THE SOCIAL MAN

'Man in his uncivilised, unsocial form'—and that is 'man ... just as he is (today), corrupted by the whole organisation of our society' (3,159)—suffers from yet another estrangement. Not only is he alienated from himself and from human nature as his indispensable foundation, he is also estranged from his fellow-man. Today, all interhuman relationships are affected by the breakdown of the social cement of true humanity. Again, Marx speaks of a practical alienation and of its theoretical counterpart.

The practical 'separation and remoteness of man from man' can be seen already in the very structure of contemporary society: in it the individual is sovereign. The French Revolution, in securing civil rights for everybody, may have achieved political emancipation but it did not come anywhere near human emancipation, i.e. the establishment of human brotherhood. In fact, it practically opened the door to a fragmentation of society through economic competition, making everybody everybody else's enemy, to a degree unheard of in the previous age of feudalism and guilds. Political emancipation merely fanned individual egoism (3,168), and actually facilitated 'the universal unrestrained movement of the elementary forces of life freed from the fetters of privilege'. 'Civil society as a whole' is now 'this war against one another of all individuals' (4,116). It has developed into the anarchy of 'so-called free competition' (3,242). Its signature is Private Property which fundamentally denies the principles of philanthropy and human togetherness.

For Marx, Christianity again is the theoretical expression of the p. 257 existing practical fragmentation of society. Christianity essentially separates man from man. Originally, Marx here seems to follow the assessment of early Christianity in the philosophy of German Idealism. Hegel, for instance, praised Christianity, for having established 'the infinite worth of the individual soul', for the first time in human history. Later, e.g. in the appendix to his doctoral dissertation (representing his first systematic criticism of religion) as well as in his article 'On the Jewish Question' of 1843, Marx blamed especially



Christian eschatology, in his words the 'Christian egoism of heavenly bliss' (3,174), for what he felt was the socially disintegrating force of the Christian faith: 'Religion ... expresses, the separation and remoteness of man from man' (3,159). Again, on another occasion, Marx criticised what he saw as the 'religious hypocrisy' which, imagining some fictitious saviour, 'takes away from the other man what he has deserved in respect of me in order to give to God' (4,173). Protesting this, Marx insists that man is essentially and must again become in reality a 'Gattungswesen', i.e. a social being. Or, in even stronger terms: we must realise that the greatest wealth of the human being is the other human being (3,304). Therefore people must associate again and overcome the dreadful divisions which presently cut up the body of the great 'St. Humanus'. Thus the postulate of Communism.

First, the practical forms of estrangement of man from man must be abolished: private property must be replaced by common ownership, and competition by the joint and reasonable organisation of production according to plan. That is the task for 'the next period of historical development in the emancipation and recovery of mankind' (3,306).

But this is not all; the abolition of private property is not the final goal of human development. Rather, that goal must be the establishment of true commonality of human life generally, of a truly 'human, i.e. social existence' (3,297). A change in property structures is only the external prerequisite for the 'reintegration or return of man to himself' (3,296), a much deeper, anthropological purpose.

We are here faced with the greater problem of a change in human nature itself, of the creation of a 'new type of man', a change that goes far beyond a change in social structures. Marx approvingly quotes a passage from Rousseau who pointed out that, if there was to be a new society, each individual also needed to be transformed from a merely solitary, isolated, individual existence into a social being and a responsible part of the whole. 'Only then' would 'human emancipation', i.e. the indispensable humanisation of man 'be accomplished' (3,167f.). [p. 258](#)

## **OUR THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE**

We have seen that Marxism holds a number of essential beliefs which, by their very nature, must be of interest to the Christian. It has been shown in addition, that Marxism's positive tenets were each and all understood as so many critical attacks on Christianity. This is obviously true for his stance of atheism, but also for what he saw as communism and 'real humanism'. Marx understood his position throughout as a negation of the Christian religion.

How is Christian theology to respond to these attacks? Must it submit to the criticism proposed? Should it feel misrepresented? Or should we think that Marx did understand Christianity correctly, but unfortunately made the wrong choice himself? We will look at his proposals, in reverse order.

### **NEIGHBOUR-CENTRED STEWARDSHIP—OUR RESPONSE TO COMMUNISM**

Christianity, as depicted in the Bible, clearly stands for the principle of community. Jesus declared love of God and love of neighbour to be the two great commandments, both of equal weight, even if love of God came first. As his definition of the commandment to love one's neighbour he gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. At the end of this story it becomes plain that Jesus replaced the prevalent ego-centric picture of ethics with a

neighbour-centred orientation. Concern for one's neighbour in need overruled concern for oneself.

The early church followed this teaching in practice. Christians shared their possessions. The apostle Paul arranged for a large-scale solidarity collection taken in Europe for the afflicted church overseas. There is no room here to list all the phenomena and facts that are evidence for Christianity's emphasis on fellowship. This concern goes beyond the borders of the established church, too, to the advocacy of commonalities in the life of society in general.

In terms of modern politics and economics, Christians would always support the cooperative and participatory principle instead of the adversary approach in industry. Christianity certainly does not, as Marx suggested, stand for the principle of 'unrestrained movement' of the social forces, or for unlimited competition. This attitude is outrightly eliminated by the fact that Scripture does not teach human autonomy and exclusive, absolute private property holding (that is the stance of Roman Law), but the principle of stewardship, of man's responsible tenancy of creation, within the framework of God's commandments. To turn Christianity into a theory of political p. 259 individualism, exclusive private property and unrestrained competition is a historical construct that borders on the ridiculous: one might then also claim that Christianity had triggered the French Revolution of 1789 because it enacted political emancipation although it became the victim of the Revolution. A similar unevenness emerges, by the way, when Marx postulates unlimited liberty of man regarding God, but deplores it in society.

The property question, raised everywhere by Communism according to the Communist Manifesto, clearly needs to be faced squarely and must be answered by Christian theology which has been somewhat deficient in the field. However, it is obvious that Christianity has never advocated the compulsory institution of common property, although it always encouraged common property holding as a voluntary measure. It never stood for the general communisation of individual properties, not the least because that would be but a mechanistic and thus unsuccessful attempt to obtain true commonality. Such a programme is ridden with problems, as the varied history of the theme in the Soviet Union demonstrates. True brotherhood and association presuppose an unselfish mind, heart, and motivation. The establishment of common property holding is, as are all changes of structure, merely a legal measure, and we know from the New Testament that the law can indeed restrain the evildoer, but it cannot change the heart and bring about the 'new man' and an ideal society. It indeed takes a change of human nature in the individual to make a person unselfish and willing beyond the observance of restrictions and laws.

## **COSTLY SOCIAL SERVICE AS A RESPONSE TO MARXIST HUMANISM**

Biblical Christianity certainly agrees that it is necessary and, indeed, obligatory to be concerned not only with a person's soul, but also with the body. This is again made quite obvious in the parable of the Good Samaritan as Christ's explanation of the commandment to love one's neighbour. The righteous deed there consists of physical caretaking. Jesus equated doing good with saving life ([Mark 3:4](#)), and he taught the famous list of the so-called six bodily works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and grant fellowship to the sick and the captive—as the standards of the Judgment to come ([Mt. 25:31–46](#)).

Almost the whole of Jesus' earthly career was a succession of healings. In the last analysis, everything he did represented, as it were, the continuation of God's work of



sustainment of creation, on a higher [p. 260](#) level. Seen from this point of view, even his work of salvation is sustainment extraordinary.

We are primarily pointing at Jesus because it seems to be necessary for any inquirer to study Christianity in the person, the teaching, and the actions of Christ, just as we try to assess Marxism from a study of the writings of Karl Marx. Perhaps Marx would not wish to be judged by an evaluation, say, of the politics of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge although they are confessed Marxists.

The concern for 'real humanism' is present not only in Jesus' own teaching and action but also in the letters of the apostles, e.g. when, almost with the same words, James warns Christians to care for the poor not only with sweet and comforting words. This is echoed in the letters of John who urges Christians to love not with words, but with deeds. John wants to see a practical Christianity. He seems to come very close to the sentiment recently expressed by a native Canadian at the Vancouver Conference of the World Council of Churches when he said: 'I tell the church: get real, or get lost!'

With the concern for 'real humanism' in mind, one might also scan the history of the Church to see whether it showed any practical appreciation of the teaching and example of its master. The early church soon began to copy Christ in his feeding of the masses. Christians were the initiators of health care and hospitals. To the present day, it is still true that atheists seldom go out to set up clinics for lepers and other diseased persons, except when aroused by the challenge of Christianity's track record.

In this regard, it is remarkable that Marx, when he pronounced the principle of 'real humanism' that was also to take into account the human body, always seemed to think of the poor and oppressed, but not also of the sick. Marx proposed 'to upturn human conditions'. Jesus seems to have opted for the immediate personal encounter and healing—and perhaps that was the only method that would indeed help the sick.

In all of this, one cannot fairly accuse Christianity of being preoccupied with otherworldliness. Even the 'essentiality of nature', that Marx was concerned with, may, in the long run, be better safeguarded by someone who considers himself a responsible tenant in creation, than by someone who feels he is the master of the universe who would be responsible to no-one.

The same goes for the 'essentiality of man' and the protection of his dignity. Marxists emphasise the responsibility of the individual to the collective, practically replacing God with The Group. Some of them have attempted to inculcate social conscience by way of psychological [p. 261](#) manipulation. Against this, one would do well to remember that already in antiquity Cicero observed the astonishing individuality of conscience which would continue to accuse one's evil even against a thousand voices condoning it. Again, we are faced with the difficulty that brotherliness cannot be legislated or even inculcated by way of psychological training. 'Strength to love' is a quality not generated by human art alone.

The Bible insists that God himself is the true guarantor of our neighbour's life. On the other hand we are aware of the historical evidence that the proclamation of atheism was often followed by the practical elimination of freedom and the abuse of the defenceless. A humanity without God produces a humanity without fellow-man. This leads on to our last point: the question of atheism.

## **FREEDOM IN SERVANTHOOD RESPONDS TO FREEDOM IN ATHEISM**

The primary concern behind Karl Marx' option for atheism seems to have been not so much human dignity, as unlimited freedom for man. He took faith in God to be acquiescence to human servitude. It was already perplexing to see that Marx only allowed

for the alternatives of either individualism or collectivism, placing Christianity on the bad side: individualism. He did not allow for a third option, Christianity's own social concept of brotherhood which recognizes the gift of personhood and individuality before God, in the midst of a fellowship. It is similarly disturbing that Marx, like Feuerbach, Bakunin, and Nietzsche, seems to have been unable to think of God's authority without seeing the freedom of man endangered. But cannot man be subject and agent, if God is? They all think in terms of the alternatives of free and slave and nowhere seem to consider the authentic Biblical categories of—in the Old Testament—man as vice-gerent, as God's chief executive officer in creation, and its New Testament equivalent, the householder, so frequent in Christ's parables. We must even claim the Gospel image of the 'son', the son of the owner of farm or vineyard who works together with his father, not forgetting that he has said 'All that is mine is yours also.'

When Marx ignores the evangelical concept of man as the 'son' of God who cooperates with the Father, he renders himself also unable to understand a foundational Biblical idea like 'loving the Lord, your God'. To him, loving God, loving a lord is incomprehensible. Indeed it may be if one merely looks at nature deities and fails to recognize the God of history. 'Loving the Lord' indeed is a dialectic which makes [p. 262](#) sense only where there is a presupposition like God's word, 'I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' That is the root of sonship, gratitude, and love: 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt' ([Hosea 11:1](#)). Human love is the answer to God's preceding love.

It seems that Marx' criticism pays dearly for setting out from the undialectical rationalism of eighteenth century French atheists, approaching the criticism of religion solely from the angle of nature religion and the gods of thunder and lightning, but ignoring the God of history and the history of salvation, beginning with the experience of Israel. We must insist on this distinction. Nature religion will always be uncertain and ambiguous in that in nature we meet both beauty and terror. A confident understanding of nature can only develop where God has been understood from his work in history where we see him as the Merciful King. In itself, nature can only pose questions and make them pressing.

All this seems to be unknown to the critics, and we are left with a number of abstract, lifeless 'either/ors' which fit the phenomena of neither life nor Christianity, and smack of shortsighted rationalism. In the event, there seems to be more practical freedom under God's sovereignty than under the rule of man. This is indeed a basic alternative. At this point, Christianity declares that atheism and secularism are theoretically and practically unwise, but also unreasonable and perilous.

For one thing, we need to acknowledge God the Creator. Granted, the cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God cannot compellingly demonstrate the person of the Creator. But they have much in nature that speaks for them and renders the atheist stance impossible. Also, the current belief that the present sophisticated state of nature is but the result of chance, is highly improbable and seems to demand a credulity that is more irrational than faith in divine creation. Atheists have never really been able to answer the question: Why is it that there is not nothing? We need to acknowledge the Creator. We cannot emancipate ourselves from the physical laws of nature, and we cannot get out of the moral laws built into the world either, without risking the destruction of life.

In addition, we need to be thankful for God the Saviour, for Christ, the great preacher and practitioner of God's own philanthropy. He liberates us from our corrupted past. He is the only Inspirer and Enabler of that change of human nature that creates a new type of person and effects a sustained and practical love for one's neighbour. Christ is also our hope that we will one day attain the eternal destiny of [p. 263](#) man. Christianity can never reduce itself to a this-worldly argument alone.

## CHRISTIAN SELF-CRITICISM AND IDENTITY IN CHRIST

When all this is said and the Christianity of Christ vindicated, we as Christians stand convicted:

—of our own secularism, having ourselves lived as if God did not exist,  
—of the discrepancy between theory and practice in our lives,  
—and of our rationalisations when we ignored man's body for the sake of his soul, or his soul for the sake of his body, and when we ignored love of neighbour allegedly for the sake of love of God, and love of God allegedly for love of neighbour.

Moreover, we stand convicted of our frequent manipulations of Christ's teaching, with the intent to enhance its appeal to our generation, only to see it condemned by the next. We apologise for our zest to accommodate the Gospel to the ruling ideas of any given time and for the damage that this has done to generation after generation. Some of Marx' criticism indeed fits theologians contemporary to him, and others who followed. It does not fit the founder of Christianity. This critique functions proportionately to our distance from Christ. However, although we plead guilty to any rightful criticism of our own conduct, and want to change, we would rather identify with Jesus and have Christianity judged on the merits of his case alone.

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(All numbers in brackets refer to volume and page numbers in Karl Marx—Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, New York [International Publishers, 1975ff.]. Volume 1 contains Marx' writings of 1835–1843, volume 2 those of 1843–44, volume 3 those of 1844–45.) p. 264

## A Declaration of Conscience about the Arms Race

*An Affirmation by the Faculty and and Board of Trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, U.S.A.*

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The continuing world arms race consumes enormous resources worldwide and does not ensure—and indeed may greatly endanger—the future of the human family on God's earth and the continuation of human civilization as we know it. We are compelled, as evangelical followers of Jesus Christ, to rededicate ourselves to the task of peacemaking. In so doing, we join many fellow Christians and urge still others to join us.