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## 855TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD AT THE NATIONAL CLUB, 12, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE,  
LONDON, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, APRIL 17TH, 1944, AT 6 P.M.

R. E. D. CLARK, ESQ., M.A., PH.D., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon the Rev. D. R. Davies to read his paper entitled "Christianity and Marxism."

The meeting was later thrown open to discussion, in which Dr. L. Richmond Wheeler, Dr. Farmer, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Mandeville and Dr. Clark took part.

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### *CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM.*

By REV. D. R. DAVIES.

THE question we propose to examine in this lecture is that of the relation between Christianity and Marxism, which is both a metaphysic and a philosophy of history. It is as a philosophy of history that Marxism has exercised its undoubtedly great influence on the contemporary world. But Marxism, as a philosophy of history, derives from, or at any rate implies a metaphysic, a system or philosophy of ultimate being. Philosophically, therefore, Marxism is compounded of two main elements, namely, the metaphysics (if such it can be called) of Dialectical Materialism and the philosophy of Historical Materialism. Historical Materialism is Dialectical Materialism in terms of history, of men, events, institutions. To confine our attention to Dialectical Materialism, to the mere metaphysic, would be hopelessly academic and would miss the genius and the significance of Marxism altogether. Professor Macmurray has stated that the most characteristic idea of the Marxist outlook is the union of theory and practice. It is certainly fundamental in Marxism. Hence, to discuss Marxism in terms of theory only, of metaphysics only, is, in fact, to distort it. Marxism is a unification of theory and practice. And the practice is reflected in its philosophy of history, or, in other words, Historical Materialism.

It is surely unnecessary to argue at any length to-day for the importance of Marxism. Whether it is true or not; whether it is scientific or not, it is most certainly true that it has been passionately believed by vast masses of men throughout the whole world. Ideas assume considerable importance, irrespective of their truth or falsehood, when they move masses. And

Marxism has moved the millions at second and third remove. It was one of the decisive factors in the greatest historical event since the French Revolution of 1789. It is at least as significant for the Bolshevik Revolution as were Rousseau and the Encyclopedists for the French Revolution. There can, therefore, be no reasonable doubt about either the wisdom or the desirability of attempting to discover and analyse the relations between Christianity and so influential a system of thought as Marxism has proved itself to be. What I may term the evangelical obligation of theology is conclusive in this matter. Christianity cannot be effectively commended to a generation about whose ideas Christians remain in ignorance.

Only a few words of biography are necessary. Marxism, of course, derives its name from Karl Marx, who was born in Trier in 1818. He studied law and was intended to follow the profession of his father, who was a Prussian civil servant, a converted Jew. But at the university, which was dominated by Hegel, as was the whole of Germany at that time, Marx became associated with a radical group, later known as the Left Hegelians. So instead of becoming the devoted servant of the Prussian State, he evolved into one of its most powerful enemies, and spent almost the whole of his life, after leaving the university, in exile in Belgium, France and England. Most of his life was spent in London, in poverty and humiliation, dependent mostly upon the generosity of his very devoted friend and disciple, Engels. His life followed consistently the pattern of his philosophy, in that he combined theory and practice in his own behaviour. He wrote voluminously and organized incessantly. His great theoretical work was his "Capital." His great practical work was the First International. He was both its creator and destroyer. His life was devoted to the task of making Socialism both scientific and revolutionary, in the course of which he developed his ideas as a system of materialism, dialectical and historical. Like his racial predecessor, Moses, he never entered the Promised Land. The revolution which he saw just ahead of him did not materialize until 33 years after his death. But he sowed the seed and tended the plant to maturity. It is this activity which is summed up in the word "Marxism."

## I.

As a purely philosophical system, a metaphysics, Marxism is elementary. It defines Reality ultimately in terms of matter.

It differs from all schools of subjective idealism in its affirmation (a) that there is an external, objective, concrete reality, independent of man; (b) and that reality is matter. This reality, matter, is in no way dependent upon any thinking mind, upon any subjective process whatsoever. Reality exists whether man thinks it or not. In virtue of this affirmation, Marxism belongs to the school of materialism. It does what all the other materialists do. It takes one of the two entities of human experience, namely, matter, and makes it primary, and so reduces mind, the other fundamental entity, to a mere epiphenomenon of matter. Marx himself did little or nothing more than affirm matter to be the sole, ultimate reality of the universe. He never developed that position philosophically into anything like a system. Consequently, there is in Marxism no discussion of ultimate philosophical problems, and very little in the great classical Marxists except on particular points of controversy, e.g., Lenin's discussion of Kantian idealism (which denies the basic materialist doctrine of Marx) in his *Empirio-Criticism*. The fundamental problems in Marxism are sociological rather than philosophical, as can be seen by a perusal of such a classic as "The Fundamental Problems of Marxism," by Plekhanov, who still remains the outstanding Marxist theorist.

While, therefore, its identification of reality as matter places Marxism within the stream of materialist philosophies, it nevertheless claims to be different and distinct from them. And that claim must be conceded to this extent at least: that whereas all the other materialist systems proclaim a static doctrine of material reality, Marxism distinguishes itself from them by its doctrine of dynamic matter, matter in motion. Reality (matter) is in movement, and that movement is "dialectical." Hence Dialectical Materialism. This is where the influence of Hegel came in. Hegel's philosophy of absolute Idealism also emphasized the kinetic character of reality, which, however, he affirmed to be idea and spirit. Marx rejected the content of Hegelianism whilst accepting its form. Hegel argued that the Absolute Idea was in movement, not a straight linear movement, but dialectical. The Absolute Idea is, to begin with, undifferentiated. It then breaks up and in the process of breaking up it creates an opposite to itself, which in turn gives rise to a new form or entity in which the two previous opposites are combined into an integral unity, which again breaks up into dialectical process.

And so on. This is the famous Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis.\*

For Absolute Idea Marx substitutes matter and then predicates of matter the dialectical movement which Hegel described as the movement of Absolute Idea. Reality is, in the beginning, undifferentiated matter, which breaks up into thesis, out of which arises antithesis. In the opposition between these two there gradually emerges the synthesis, in which thesis and antithesis form a new unity. Then this new unity undergoes the merry-go-round of differentiation. And so on *ad infinitum*. Reality, therefore, is matter in a state of perpetual development (*Durfurchung*). It is in the course of this development that mind, society and history take shape. They constitute the detailed definition and identification of the original, undifferentiated reality (matter). Reality is thus not a thing, a substance, but a process. Stated in this way, Marxist Materialism has affinities with non-materialist and Christian philosophies, which will be discussed at a later stage of the argument.

Now Marx's system, or rather sketch (since it is no more) was merely a peg on which to hang his philosophy of history, otherwise known as Historical Materialism. That was the thing in which Marx was supremely interested. And it has remained almost the exclusive interest of Marxists. In any case, it is most certainly the dominating interest of all post-Marx Marxism. Marx was no metaphysician, systematic or otherwise. But he was sufficiently a philosopher to appreciate the necessity for a metaphysical foundation for his philosophy of history, which enabled him to convince himself, even though he convinced nobody else, that his historic formulas corresponded to the nature of the universe. What, then, is the Marxism philosophy of history, the system of Historical Materialism?

"The history of all human society"—so begins the Communist Manifesto—"past and present, has been the history of class-struggles." In all Marxist historical thinking, class is a basic category. Marx defines class by its relation between society, or any section of society, and the forces of production. Primitive society, *i.e.*, pre-historical, was an undifferentiated social unity. History is the process of the break-up of that primitive social unity into conflicting classes, that is, into sections of society opposed to one another because of their different relations to the

\* Hegel formulates the dialectic in his "Phenomenology of Mind." *Vide* selections from Hegel (Scribner & Sons, 1929), pp. 15-35.

means of wealth-production. The determining factor in the development of history is this struggle of classes for the ownership of the forces of production and the control of the product. The dynamic impelling history forward is class-conflict. The life-force of history is class-struggle. Thus, in the undeniable grandeur and sweep of the Marxist vision of history, mankind begins its planetary career in the idyllic simplicity and unity of primitive communism, then moves through the tragedy and conflict of historic class-struggle, finally to attain to the new synthesis and unity of a historical communism, in which all classes have been resolved into one grand human community. Whatever else may be said about this grandiose vision, it most certainly has about it a touch of nobility and vastness, penetrated by hope and faith. From the plain of primitive human unity down through the valley of class-conflict and division up to the bracing uplands of an achieved human unity—here is the formula or pattern of the Marxist philosophy of history, otherwise Historical Materialism.

The social mechanism by which the whole historic process of social development through class-conflict works is Revolution, which is the point of transition from one class-domination to another. So by Revolution Marx means a shift in class-power. When this happens, as in the French Revolution, there is a definite forward movement of history. One class moves off the stage to give way to another. This process has been operating from the beginning of history until now, in the capitalist era, when the classes in conflict have been reduced to two—the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. Capitalist civilization is the final phase of class-society. It is the final logic of the historical process in which the last class-battle is being fought out to the certain victory of the Proletariat. The triumph of the Proletariat (working-class) is the opening of a really new phase in man's historical destiny. On the one hand, it liquidates the remains of class-society by the abolition of the capitalist class. On the other hand, it lays the foundations of a really human society, of a single human community. All mankind is now incorporated into, and identified with, the sole remaining class, the Proletariat. This twofold process operates by means of the celebrated Dictatorship of the Proletariat. By the seizure of political power, the party of the Proletariat uses the State and the forces of production to crush all opposition. When that has been satisfactorily achieved, then human history will really

begin; the tentative beginnings of man's true destiny will emerge; there will begin the new human process, in which "the oppression of men will be replaced by the administration of things." What will happen in that final Eldorado of communist society can only be left to the imagination. The only thing which Marx himself ever ventured to say about it was that it would be a world in which everyone would work according to his ability and be rewarded according to his need. Perhaps we had better leave it at that.

Now this entire historic process operates independently of the human will. In *theory*, there can be no reasonable doubt that Marx affirmed the inevitability of the whole process. It grinds its way forward like a car of Juggernaut, relentlessly. The wills of men are mere instruments of the process. "The moving Finger writes, and having writ, moves on." Yet in *practice*, Marx (and all genuine Marxists) thinks and acts as though the human agent is, if not decisive, at least creative and effective, a feature which is closely parallel to Calvinism, which in theory was a suffocating determinism. Yet in practice Calvinists acted as though they were free—very much so. Trotsky explained this paradox by saying that communist responsibility was part of the historic process. Professor Laski has brilliantly elaborated a striking parallel between the Bolsheviks (who *were* classic Marxists) and the Puritans. "There is the same consciousness of election, the same realization of the infinite worth of grace, the same contempt for the normal habits of human nature, a good deal, too, of the Puritan's conviction that whatever denies his central truth is error from the devil, the infection from which cannot be destroyed too early."\* Man is the instrument of the historic process. Marxism claims to be the conscious realization of that fact, that it is the subjective reflection of that objective reality. Marx's analysis of Revolution is an interesting and relevant illustration of this claim.

Why do revolutions happen when they do? Can they not happen at any time? To this question Marx returns a clear negative. Revolutions happen only when the historical conditions are ripe—and not a moment before. They happen, that is to say, when productive class relations check and inhibit the forces of production. So long as a particular social system (class-relations) stimulates and increases the capacity to produce

\* *Vide* "Reflections on the Revolution of our Time," p. 72. (Allen and Unwin, 1943.)



wealth, revolution is impossible, whatever injustices it may inflict on men. But when a social system arrives at the point of interfering with and holding back the flow of wealth, then it breaks down and finally results in revolution, in the attempt by the oppressed class to wrest power from the hands of the oppressing class. The oppressed class is finally driven to this extreme measure by the failure of the system to satisfy its wants. The will to revolution is the product of the failure of a social system to function. The French Revolution of 1789-93 was the consequence of the breakdown of French Feudalism. The French Commune of 1871 was a premature attempt at Revolution before the historical conditions were ripe, before the capitalist system had yet exhausted its possibilities. Men cannot anticipate history.

## II

As compared with Christianity, Marxism has both affinities with it, and antipathies to it. Marxism is by no means wholly opposed. Ultimately, of course, there is a profound and absolute opposition between them. But in many matters of detail and emphasis, there is a quite remarkable approximation between them. We will note a few of these.

First, let us indicate the affinities.

(a) Marxian materialism is partly an affinity with Christianity, and partly an antipathy. It is not wholly opposed to a religion which affirms, as its central doctrine, that God once took to Himself a body of matter. Of course, in so far as Marxism asserts that spirit is mere epiphenomenon, mere product of matter in motion, it denies the fundamental doctrine that God is spirit. But in actual practice, Marxism relates matter and spirit so closely and organically, that it may be said that it does more justice to the Christian insistence on the necessity of matter than the systems of Subjective Idealism, from Plato to Hegel. From the Marxist relationship of spirit and matter comes its doctrine of the union of theory and practice. This corresponds both to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, that in Christ Jesus spirit and matter were perfectly related, and also to the Christian ethic that obedience to the will of God must be expressed in behaviour and character. That is to say, that obedience to God necessarily involves conduct. And what is behaviour but the use of matter in personal and social relationships? Marxist materialism does not deny spirit, or invalidate it. Its matter is matter in motion.

It is a process in which mind is an essential element. This gives it some affinity to the Christian assertion of the primacy of spirit in which matter is also an essential element.

(b) The Marxian doctrine of the historic process as something independent of the human will has some point of contact with the Christian doctrine of Providence. It is impossible to read the Bible without discovering the belief that the world, and the movement of man within that world, are ultimately dependent on the will of God and subject to the over-riding purposes of God. History is finally governed by God's intention. Marxism asserts that history is finally governed by the working out of the historic process. That, of course, is not the same thing as the Christian belief, but it certainly has some affinity or kinship with it. The Marxian doctrine of the historic process is the de-personalization of the Christian doctrine of Providence. History, says Christianity, is governed by a Person who wills. History, says Marxism, is governed by a process which secures results.

Engels, Marx's faithful disciple, has shown how the social action resulting from the inter-action of numerous individual wills is something entirely different from any of the intentions of individuals. Individual persons intend one thing, but what the historic process fashions out of such intention is something entirely different. This is a profound insight into history, and is fully in accord with Biblical revelation. Isaiah, for instance (chapter xlv) tells how God uses Cyrus, an imperialist marander, to execute His judgment and purpose for Israel. The intention of Cyrus is the conquest of Babylon, which God uses for the purification and preparation of the Jew for a different kind of destiny altogether. History, which man endeavours to make into the means of his independence of God, becomes the scene of God's will to redeem the human race. There is, therefore, more than a superficial resemblance between the Marxist doctrine of historic process, and the Christian doctrine of Divine Providence.

(c) There is a third point of affinity with Christianity in the Marxist doctrine of Determinism, which it is misleading to describe as "Economic Determinism." It is hardly correct to say that Marx taught that man is determined mainly by economic forces. What Marx did teach was that men are determined by the total complex of social class relations which turn on the possession and control of the means of wealth production—which is a difference with a real distinction. Pure economic determin-

ism is crude materialism, which Marxism certainly is not. In a celebrated letter to J. Bloch (September 21, 1890), Engels deals with the popular distortion of Marxist Determinism. "According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is *ultimately* (Engels' italic) the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* (Engels' italic) determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase."\* Among the factors determining the human will, then, are intellectual, social and spiritual elements.

Christian doctrine has never asserted the absolute freedom of the human will. Both Catholic and Reform theology has insisted upon the corrupting element of sin in the human will. In the conflict between egocentric individuals and societies, freedom turns into necessity.† The will is thus enslaved by sin. Marxist analysis of social development is the translation into concrete political, economic and social terms of the theological concept of the limitation of man's will in history, and is, thus, a genuine insight.

(d) Finally, we may note what is probably the deepest affinity between Marxism and Christianity, which is one, not so much of doctrine, as of ethos, flair and temper. It is an affinity of attitude, of appreciation of experience and history. This can, perhaps, be best described by saying that both Marxism and Christianity have the tragic view of life. The Marxist insistence on the inevitability of revolution as a means of resolving class-struggle has a profound correspondence to the Christian affirmation of the inevitability of pain and suffering as the result of sin. Thus both Marxism and Christianity are marked by a tragic realism. Both are far removed from the shallow optimism of Hegelianism and its Liberal derivatives in the XIXth century, with their delusive dreams of a painless progression to perfection. Marx was a Jew, and what Jew, with the Jew's terrible history, could ever be a mere optimist? He was characterized by a strain of what can only be adequately described as "prophetic insight." Indeed, it is not altogether fantastic to describe Marx as the last of the Hebrew prophets. He was essentially

\* *Vide* Marx-Engels' "Selected Correspondence" (Martin Lawrence, 1934). Letter 213.

† *Vide* the author's "Two Humanities," James Clarke & Co., 1940), pp. 64-71, for description of this point.

tragic. Marxism was inevitably permeated by the tragic view of life. It has a realistic estimation of the depth, irrationality and persistence of the vested selfishness of men in their social and class relations. A characteristic expression of this Marxist sense of tragedy is to be found in the profound judgment of Lenin in 1919, when he said that the world was entering on an era of wars, civil wars and revolutions. Events have proved that he saw more deeply into things than those—whose name is legion—who prophesied smooth things.

Christianity, rooted as it is in the Bible, is also tragic—essentially and profoundly so. At the heart of Christian Faith is the Cross, the supreme symbol of suffering and tragedy. It is one of the idiocies of modern thought that Christianity could ever have been identified with a sentimental Liberalism, with a romantic trust in the goodness and rationality of human nature. A religion which realized the meaning of the Cross, namely, that the response of human nature to perfect goodness was hatred and murder, has therefore much more in common with Marxism, with its realistic appraisal of human irrationality, than with any sentimental idealisms, however pious, spiritual and even religious they may happen to be.

Close and considerable as are the affinities between Marxism and Christianity, nevertheless the antipathies and disagreements between them are even more considerable and significant. Let us turn to an examination of some of them.

(a) Fundamental is the difference between the Marxist historic process and the Christian doctrine of God. Whilst there are elements in common, as we have already seen, the fact that historic process, which is the Marxist God, is process and is impersonal brings Marxism into violent conflict with Christianity, with its doctrine of God as the Lord and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is ultimately the difference between an impersonal fate and a personal will, between matter self-existent and Divine creation of the world and man; between rationalism and revelation; between progress and redemption; between human achievement and repentance. Christianity is founded upon the revelation of a personal God. Marxism stems from a mere rationalist hypothesis.

(b) Equally fundamental and serious is the divergence between Marxism and Christianity in their respective doctrines of man and human nature, and vital for all questions of conduct and action. From this divergence springs the whole difference in

ethical principles and moral values. Two points relative to the doctrine of man call for comment.

(1) Marxism takes for granted, of course, that man is a purely social product. The individual is "the ensemble of social relations." This view was a protest, only partly conscious, against the prevailing individualism and its consequent view of society as a bundle of individuals. Society, on the contrary, according to Marxism, is the real unit in which the individual is but an element. The individual person therefore can be analyzed into his component elements, so that in him, there is no ultimate nucleus or core of being. He is completely social. He is simply the point at which social relations become conscious.

Now in contra-distinction to this view, Christianity holds that man was created by God out of nothing. This, of course, does not mean that the individual exists apart from society—which is the heresy of Protestant individualism. Christianity also insists that man is a social being, not however in the sense that he is a product of society, but in the sense that the individuality, the basic identity of the individual, comes to self-conscious realization only within society, in the interaction of social relations. Society, therefore, is not, as in Marxist theory, a self-contained and self-existent unity, but is a subordinate, dependent entity—subordinate to and dependent upon God. It is hardly necessary to point out that the ethical consequences of this doctrine of man are profound and fundamental. Society, not being absolute, cannot claim the absolute allegiance of the individual, which is owed to God. Society claims the service of the individual *because it is the creation of God*, not because of any inherent right of its own. This explains the Marxist paradox that whilst Morality (the basic sense of obligation) is relative, the moralities (the formal embodiment of obligation) tend to be absolute. That is to say, obligation to the class tends to become absolute, to override all other obligations. What promotes class-interest is right. The end justifies the means, etc.\* Thus, in practice, the doctrine that society is a self-existent absolute leads inevitably to the corruption of all morality, since power becomes an end in itself. It is not an accident that the dictatorships, both of the Right and the Left, have found the strongest

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\* For an acute discussion of the corrupting influence of moral relativism in relation to the Russian Communist Party, *vide* Mr. Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" (Jonathan Cape), one of the most searching novels of the last decade.

opposition in the Churches, which are the guardians of the doctrine that society is subordinate to God.

(2) But the greatest cleavage—so great as to be an abyss—between Marxism and Christianity in their respective views of human nature is to be found in the Christian dogma of Original Sin. Christianity asserts that, because of his radical sin against God, man stands in need of redemption. Man is incapable of solving the deep, historic problem of his divided being. That can only be done through the intervention of God which is, precisely, the message of the Christian Gospel, that in Jesus Christ, God became man for the redemption and reconciliation of the world. The whole historic process—such is the contention of Christianity—is cursed by a fatal contradiction. Man is fated to be self-destructive until he acquires a new nature and will, which is the gift of God in Christ, which man appropriates by faith. This is the profound insight of the Reformation doctrine of Justification by Faith.

Now Marxism agrees with the Christian affirmation of the self-contradiction of man—but only for part of the historic process. *Man is self-destructive throughout the class-phase of history.* But this self-destructiveness will cease on the morrow of the final revolution which will secure the triumph of the proletariat, destined to be the last class in history. When the Dictatorship of the Proletariat finally liquidates class-opposition, the proletariat itself will gradually disappear (the State withering away), and history will be relieved of its basic contradiction which has been its curse hitherto. Marxism, therefore, affirms two things about human nature: first, that man stands in no need of redemption (*i.e.*, salvation from the dilemma of history by outside power); because, second, man is himself capable, by organized class-power, of transcending the contradiction of his nature. In the final analysis, Marxism ceases to be tragic and becomes Liberal and optimistic and shallow. Utopia is within the power of man to achieve. At long last, human nature will be self-redemptive. This is an absolute contradiction of the Christian revelation about man, which affirms that the root of sin lies, not in social relations, but in the depths of the human heart and will, for which there is no *human* cure—only a divine one.

(c) Essentially related to this radical difference between Marxism and Christianity is another, equally final and irreconcilable, difference, namely, the Christian doctrine of the Kingdom of God and the final destiny (eschatology) of humanity. As we

have seen in the preceding discussion, Marxism believes in an earthly paradise of man's devising and creation, when all problems will become capable of solution. Where St. John, the divine, says "there shall be no more sea," St. Karl, the not-so divine, says "there shall be no more dialectic." The fulfilment of history, that is to say, the full realization of all the latent possibilities of human nature, lies *within* the historic process. The turbulent, torrential stream of history will flow at last, *on the same level*, into the wide, calm-bosomed sea. Now Christianity is a direct negation of this rosy illusion. The fulfilment of history, on the contrary, lies beyond and above the historic process. History, the scene of egocentric human will, with its fatal, contradictory impotence, will come to an end. The human experiment of man trying to be his own god will terminate at last, and God will Himself fulfil the human possibility. This is the essence of New Testament eschatology. History, to the end, will be an arena of frustration. Fulfilment—Realization—will be the act of God beyond Time, with its tears and tragedy. These two views of human destiny are complete opposites, which no dialectic, Marxist or otherwise, can ever reconcile or interpenetrate.

The Marxist vision of final destiny merges into mere liberalism and becomes inhuman, where the Christian vision remains transcendent and is alone human as well as divine. What can be more callous and monstrous than the idea of a final historic Utopia for a favoured minority of the whole human race? For that is what the classless society of Marxism amounts to. At a moment in the historic process will be realized the ancient dream of a golden age which has haunted man from time immemorial. But what about the myriad generations of the pre-Utopian era who toiled and suffered frustration and defeat and despair and endless agony, "their heritage a sunless day?" What of them? In the Marxist panorama of historic realization, they are no more. They were the raw material for the making of the superman of the latter days. A ghastly economy! The Christian answer to this problem is eschatological, transcendent and human. It is the resurrection of the dead. In that final Kingdom of God, that new heaven and new earth, the millions who suffered and died shall awake into a new life. That realm of God shall not be the possession of the latter generations only, but of all the vast unnumbered family of God. "I believe in the resurrection of the dead."

## III.

We have not, by any means, exhausted either the affinities or the contradictions between Marxism and Christianity, but we have indicated the most important and fundamental of them. They are sufficient—so we hope—to show the very considerable merit which attaches to Marxism as an intellectual system, as an attempt to deal with the stubborn problems of history and social development. Here was the creation of a very powerful mind, a mind, it is true, of quite extraordinary limitations; nevertheless, a mind of equally extraordinary insight into the meaning of historical development. We have to bear in mind that, in an age of unbounding prosperity, when the foundations of social order seemed forever secure and the world basked in a cloudless sunshine, we have to remind ourselves that Marx sensed the coming storms and convulsions which have broken on our generation, to our infinite cost and tragedy. On any number of questions, events have proved that Marx's reasoning was wrong. But equally they have proved that his insight was right and unerring. The logician in Marx, in the event, has been greatly inferior to the prophet in him. It is the prophetic character of Marxism which has made most valued contributions to contemporary Christian thinking. Marx more than anybody has unwittingly pioneered the idea of original sin *as a sociology*. And it is as a sociology that Christian dogma will impress a secularized generation most. If men to-day, to whom Christian theology and values have become so strange and alien, can be brought to see Christian dogma as sociology, the road to the reascendance of Christian theology will be open and will be trodden once again. The Marxist analysis of our capitalist society has made no mean contribution to the possibility of this in our time. It is most significant that the theologians who wield the greatest influence to-day, men like Berdyaev and Niebuhr, have been men who have felt the spell and the power of Marxism. So in the affinities and resemblances of Marxism to Christianity, but still more in its divergences from Christianity, Marx, without knowing it or intending it, has revealed the ultimate bankruptcy of mere humanistic thinking at its best. And what shall men say, when at last, they taste the bitterness of that bankruptcy? What but the words of the disciples of old—"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."



## DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN, Dr. R. E. D. CLARK, said : Many of us have been enjoying the books which Mr. Davies has written during the past few years. He has now added to our indebtedness by giving us a deeply interesting paper on Christianity and Marxism, a subject on which he is unusually well qualified to speak.

Before opening the meeting to general discussion there is one question which I should like to ask. In the paper four main resemblances between Christianity and Marxism are mentioned. Although the author does not pretend to have covered the subject exhaustively, this list is conspicuous for the absence of one or two apparent resemblances which have often been pointed out before, and I cannot help suspecting that Mr. Davies has some motive in excluding them. Thus, writers like Lorenz and Kolnai claim that the proletariat occupies the same psychological rôle as the Saviour in Christianity for, according to the Marxist system, it is the proletariat who bring about the final salvation of man and suffer and die in the process. Then, again, the Communist Utopia corresponds to the final Kingdom of God, though this point has been implicitly raised in the paper. It would certainly appear that Marxism has borrowed from Christianity rather freely. It would be interesting to hear whether Mr. Davies can throw any further light on the matter.

There is one further point of some interest. Can Mr. Davies tell us why it was that Marx supposed that when the Communist Utopia had at last arrived the historic process would cease ? On his view, one would have thought that the classless society would itself differentiate and the whole process start anew. What is there, in Marx's view, about a classless society which will prevent this from happening ?

Dr. RICHMOND WHEELER was sure they had all enjoyed Mr. Davies' able and interesting paper. But, in view of the terrible record of Marxism in practice in Russia and many other countries, and of its avowed basis in implacable struggle, he felt that it had been presented through somewhat pink-coloured spectacles.

For instance, the lecturer had praised the foresight of Lenin (p. 120) and Marx (p. 124), as compared with their contemporaries, in

foreseeing wars, revolutions and convulsions. Surely that was because each in his day was at the centre of the hidden forces of hate and strife, working on an atheistic basis for these evils in as many countries as possible. They knew the power of these evil forces better than well-meaning persons ; and that, as Lenin wrote, they were " limited by nothing—by no kind of law and by absolutely no rule " (*Complete Works*, xviii, 361, quoted by A. N. Field, *Why Colleges Breed Communists*, p. 80).

Dr. F. T. FARMER said : I should like to add my congratulations to Mr. Davies for giving us such a helpful review of this subject, and not being side-tracked on its many subsidiary aspects. I think, myself, it is a subject we should approach with humility for, as Mr. Davies has pointed out, there are features that are good in the philosophy of Marxism as well as bad. Let us remember that, although we have a different and indeed much higher faith, the followers of this new doctrine, which in many ways resembles a religion, have shown an enthusiasm for their cause which has scarcely been matched in the history of Christianity.

If I were asked what I regarded as the most significant feature of Marxism to-day, I should say it was its power to captivate people's minds. I do not think there is anything in history, at any rate since the early spread of the Christian Gospel, which has had anything like the drawing power that Marxism has on the world to-day. What is the reason for this ? I may be wrong, but I think there is only one answer, and that is that Marxism has actually achieved certain of the practical aims which Christianity has preached and striven for but still not achieved. I need not enumerate these in detail ; they are too familiar to us. To mention one or two, the recognition of the ordinary common folk as worthy of the highest place in the kingdom, the provision of necessities for the poor before luxuries for the rich, the substitution (to some extent at least) of the competitive spirit by one of service and co-operation for the good of all.

It is surely because of these that millions of people the world over have been swayed by this new " religion," and find themselves in a dilemma whether to follow it or Jesus Christ. As Stanley Jones relates of an Indian Christian, " I see the Russian Communists

producing something in an unchristian way which we ought to, but cannot, produce in a Christian way." That is the acute issue facing the Christian Church to-day. How are we going to meet it ?

Mr. A. KROLENBAUM said : In the course of his paper the lecturer suggested that Marxism is bound to make its followers conscious of a void in their souls, because it (Marxism) has not " the words of life." I found this true in the works of outstanding men who had made a name for themselves in the Marxist movement.

But this was true, in the main, until Russia's entry into the war. Up to that moment men like Max Eastman, Eugene Lyons, and some of the younger generation of English poets confessed their error of worshipping the Marxist State, which, experience taught them, was not salvational but totalitarian, as Hitler's or Mussolini's. Since, however, the Russian armies proved victorious, this self-analysis has stopped, or, at the very least, been postponed. In my experience from day to day as a missionary, I find the people exceedingly inclined to worship Marxism with the former fervour.

Britain's alliance with Russia implies our having to live in harmony with each other in the post-war world. What points of contact, then, are there between Christianity and Marxism to enable them to co-exist side by side, instead of being, as hitherto, mutually exclusive ?

Mr. D. C. MANDEVILLE said : I am concerned with the Marxist conflict as seen in industry—the two big classes in opposition. When does a revolution occur ? Mr. Davies has analysed the position. As long as the owner-class continues to give stimulus and increase to the production of wealth, there is no revolution. The despairing offer of " bread and circuses "—more social services and better working conditions—is of less importance and effect than progressive management, if by exercise of the latter revolution may be indefinitely postponed. " Progressive " does not necessarily mean the same as well ordered, or efficient, but in the writer's experience seems to represent a practice that is fundamentally Marxist.

This form of management does not consist in the exercise of arbitrary authority, where sanctions spring from the wealth, position

or superior experience of an individual, but in an appraisal of the material features of the situation and of its demands on manager and worker alike; not, "Do this, because I say so," but "The situation demands that we act so and so."

Again, the stimulus it gives to progress is not (as might be thought) continuous, well ordered, tending always to greater efficiency; but dialectical, striking across from extreme to extreme, seeking the full-bodied flavour of change rather than the more subtle reward of exact adjustment.

So long as this flavour of management remains and grows, the writer feels that Christians in this country would do well to take more heed of it—of the effective Marxist practice of our managing classes, than of the somewhat irrelevant Marxist theory of our Communists.

#### WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.

Rev. H. S. CURR, Ph.D., wrote: The Victoria Institute is fortunate in having secured such a paper as this, dealing with principles and problems which underlie the upheaval which has been troubling Europe since the beginning of the present century, and whose end is not yet by any manner of means. The clear and systematic fashion in which Mr. Davies discusses Marxism makes it comparatively easy for a wide circle of readers to grasp firmly and intelligently the main points at issue. That is done all the more effectively because Mr. Davies has been at such pains to do justice to those phases of this philosophy which can be described as eternally true.

I do not propose to refer to the discrepancies between Marxism and Christianity, such as the former's failure to recognise that the heart of man is incurably evil. The paper's treatment of these questions is so adequate that it may be left to speak for itself. I would rather confine my observations to two reflections. One is concerned with a radical defect in Marxism, and the other with an outstanding virtue.

The defect arises in the failure of Marx to take sufficient account of historical and geographical considerations. The *prima facie* impression, created by the information given by Mr. Davies, is that the outlook of Marx was confined to France and England. His characteristic teaching seems to have for its background the slum-

dom of nineteenth-century London, of which he doubtless knew only too much by melancholy experience. The echoes of the French Revolution also kept ringing in his ears. He appears to be so obsessed with his milieu, that he either forgot, or failed to investigate the history of mankind in all parts of the globe, ancient and modern. That would not require to be very profound or extensive. If he had read carefully the history of his own nation, as recorded in the Old Testament, with the comments of the prophets upon its course, he could never have simplified the march of history as he tried to do. He seems to use the famous framework of Hegel as a kind of bed of Procrustes, into which events must be fitted nilly willy. He appears to know nothing of the history of the United States of America during the period in which he lived. As for ancient history dealing with mighty empires and civilisations in all parts of this planet which have flourished for a season like green bay-trees, and then disappeared, leaving but few traces behind them, it seems to be impossible to explain the ebb and flow of its tides by Marxian principles.

The last words of the preceding paragraph fitly introduce one of the great merits of Marxianism. It serves as an eloquent and efficient reminder that human history is governed by laws like the processes of nature, operating in complete independence of man, and compelling his respect and obedience by tremendous penalties and tremendous prizes. Shakespeare, as usual, crystallises this truth in a way that cannot be bettered.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.

(*Hamlet*, Act V, Scene 2.)

It is not very easy to define the methods of this overruling factor. Its ways are like those of the wind which bloweth where it listeth. As far as these can be ascertained, it is hard to reconcile them with the Hegelian triad, thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Sir Isaac Newton came nearest to finding the secret when he said that action and reaction are equal and opposite. That is illustrated by the two Jerusalems. There is the old Jerusalem, with its sad and sordid story, and there is the new Jerusalem, of which it is written: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw

the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21, 1-2 R.V.).

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

The points raised by Dr. Clark are, by implication, dealt with in my paper. (1) Since the proletariat is, in the Marxist assumption, the last class in the historic process, its messianic function is implied in its task, which is to liquidate class society altogether. The proletariat is the chosen instrument of history to effect this culmination. (2) Again, on the Marxist assumption, the purpose of history is to arrive at the final synthesis which will reconcile the opposites that have appeared in the course of historical development. That final synthesis will be the merging of the working class into the whole of society—the identification of the whole society with the last class in history. Marx does not say that history will then cease, but the old dialectical historical process will cease. Engels, Marx's collaborator, states that then true history will begin.

Dr. Wheeler seems to imply that the superior insight of Marx and Lenin was due to the fact that they were greater sinners than their capitalist brethren, which, if it were true, would put a premium on vice. But it is not true. It is a fact that both Marx and Lenin showed a better understanding of the social forces of their time than their contemporaries, partly because of their hostility to them, partly because they had a philosophy of history, where most of their contemporaries had none whatever.

It is not true to say, with Dr. Farmer, that Communist zeal and devotion have hardly been matched in the history of Christianity. They have been more than matched in the devotion and heroism of the mission field. Neither can I accept Dr. Farmer's suggestion that the popularity of Communism is due to its achievement of Christian ideals, though in a non-Christian way. Communism in Russia has not, in fact, raised the economic status of the very poor. There are greater inequalities of wealth in Russia than in Britain or America. It is precisely the record of Communism in Russia which has contributed to the unpopularity of the Communist Party in Britain and America.

Mr. Mandeville's point re progressive management raises too large an issue for comment here, except to say that the essence of Marx's case against capitalism is precisely that it makes "progressive management" as envisaged by Mr. Mandeville impossible. This is what Marxism affirms. Whether its affirmation is true is another matter.

I was very interested in Principal Curr's communication. There is a good deal of truth in the Principal's point about Marx's limited historical knowledge. Marx knew a good deal of European history in its modern phase. But he certainly did not seem to show the same familiarity with ancient history. I would not altogether agree with Principal Curr's point that Marx seemed to confine himself to France. He paid at least equal attention to Britain. But, on the whole, I think Principal Curr's contentions are sound.

In reply to Mr. Krolenbaum's remarks, I should say that our alliance with Russia is dictated by natural interests, not by any possibility of philosophical identity. We must, in fact, avoid the danger of obscuring the ideological differences. It is to the interest both of Russia and Britain to co-operate in international affairs. But no national interest can ever make Communism, based on atheism, anything but repugnant to any good European.