Letters to the Editor

The Rev. J. F. Wellington writes:

Having just read the critique of *Marx and the Bible* by Peter Hebblethwaite in your winter publication [*RCL*, Vol. 5, No. 4], I feel compelled to comment upon the erroneous picture of Miranda's work contained therein. Indeed I believe that his hysterical outburst is not worthy of Keston College, unless that body approves of such crude anti-communist propaganda.

In two comments Mr Hebblethwaite sums up the poverty of his own critique. "It is a sound rule never to review a book which excites one's hostility." It is a pity that Mr Hebblethwaite did not obey this rule. His piece lacked even the smallest degree of objectivity necessary to make a review worthwhile. And: "These disgruntled remarks could ... be construed as a bourgeois reaction from someone who does not wish to be disturbed by awkward truths". I fear they are exactly that. The critique serves merely as an apology for the West without seriously listening to the protest of the Third World, here represented by Miranda.

The overriding error of Mr Hebblethwaite consists in his failure to grasp the concrete political situation which has given rise to not only the work of Miranda, but also that of other Latin American scholars. His situation is one of urgent need for liberation from economic dependence, neo-colonialism, internal and external socio-economic structures which confine the mass of the populace to a life of deprivation and powerlessness. Hence Miranda stands among the oppressed and identifies the oppressors, quite legitimately from his situation, as those who gain most from the prevailing international economic order – the rich nations of the West. He is not offering a global perspective and therefore has no brief to defend or attack the East. As far as Latin America is concerned, the East is irrelevant.

Mr Hebblethwaite too smugly dismisses Miranda's claims that the dominant social classes control the mass media and the education sys-

tem. Such a view is perfectly acceptable and respectable among sociologists. In dismissing it as "palpable rubbish" Mr Hebblethwaite betrays his own ignorance and obsession with the superficial remark.

Mr Hebblethwaite protests against Miranda's description of private property as "civilized robbery", and complains that he has not considered that it can be a bulwark for the individual against the tyranny of the State. Once again the critic misunderstands the Latin American situation which has prompted this book. To view property as such a bulwark is ludicrous where it is vested in the hands of the privileged few at the expense of the dispossessed many.

When it comes to dealing with New Testament criticism, it is Mr Hebblethwaite who stands out on a limb rather than Miranda. If we are to accept the historical priority of the Synoptics over St John, there can be little doubt that the faith to which Jesus calls men is not faith in himself but is related to the coming of the Kingdom.

Finally, having failed to provide us with any valid Christian criticism of the book, Mr Hebblethwaite calls on a Marxist for help. He may well have done better to have based the whole of his critique upon the article by Laurence Bright and upon the comments made by Fierro in *The Militant Gospel*. Then at least we would have been faced with a serious review.

Mr Peter Hebblethwaite replies:

Having been recently described by Malcolm Muggeridge in *The Times Higher Educational Supplement* as a "naive pro-communist", it is rather comforting to be accused of "crude anti-communist propaganda". Many of the points made by Mr Wellington I not only accept but made myself in *Christian-Marxist Dialogue and Beyond* (DTL, 1977).

My objection to Miranda was not that he started from the Latin American situation, but that he then proceeded to generalize. What else does it mean to declare oneself "a traitor to the West"? Mr Wellington should learn to read more carefully. The phrase "palpable rubbish" was used not of the alleged control exercised by the dominant classes over the mass media, but of the suggestion that the educational system was designed "to produce the most perfect type of slavery ever known". I find it hard to apply Miranda's generalizations ("we all know") to Britain, which, after all, is where his book is now published and distributed and where it must be presumed to have some relevance.

I admitted to irritation – and it is surely better to declare an interest than to conceal one – and must add that it was provoked by Miranda's jargon, his loose argumentation and above all his assumption, wholly unjustified, that readers who do not agree with him are either benighted fools or insensitive capitalists.