

confrontation. He thinks he can win that confrontation, because he has all the arms, and his internal opponents have none. In this he is surely as mistaken as Hitler was, in the last resort.

But a final word for the European and American reader. Where did this destructive psychology come from? Not all of it, not perhaps most of it, from the Voortrekkers and Paul Kruger, the official ancestral spirits. The modern Boers are heirs, in addition to them, of Cecil Rhodes and Chamberlain and the less attractive elements of British Imperialism too. And these are still features of the capitalist imperialism of America. And lastly, to complete the genetic mix, there is clearly an inheritance from German national socialism. From there comes the bogus theorising, the mad logic ('logical' and 'principles' are favourite words), the unrestrained and highminded brutality. To this the other, non-Boer White South Africans contribute, in the main, love of money and a rather mindless hedonistic materialism – which differs scarcely at all from the attitude to life dominant in the 'Western democracies'. So we should not be in any doubt about it; in White South Africa, for all its appalling eccentricities, we Europeans and Americans see a mirror of ourselves. And in the doom that is shortly going to overtake White South Africa we should see, if we have any wisdom at all, a judgment on ourselves.

Marxist Science and Christian Theology

Brian Wicker

Francis Barker's refreshing contribution to the *New Blackfriars* debate on Marxism¹ leads me to pursue my own thoughts a little further. Barker and Eagleton² have both accused me of idealism: it is part of my purpose to show that this accusation is false. On the contrary, if Marxism can claim to be scientific, so too (I maintain) can Christian theology. Indeed, Marxism will only become completely scientific, i.e. have shed all residual elements of deforming ideology when, ceasing to need to incorporate within itself a systematic misrepresentation of Christianity, it can be said to have become identical with it. But that is a matter for the distant future.

¹September, 1976

²October, 1975

To begin with, it is agreed I think that we are discussing questions of theory: the relative claims to scientific status of certain forms of discourse. Neither side is likely to deny that at the level of actual praxis, there is an enormous amount of ideological distortion around. But what we are talking about is what Althusser calls 'theoretical practice'. And it is my contention that what I shall call 'scientific theology' is scientific in the sense that, like Marxist science, it claims to be able to provide a 'symptomatic reading' of ideologies. Such a theology will consist of concepts and rules whereby not only the Christian ideology (that is, the Christian religion as a lived praxis) but also the ideological elements in Marxism, can be critically distinguished and dealt with.

Before I can establish this thesis, however, I must try to clarify the notion of ideology itself, and its relation to science in Marxism. I suggest that there is a systematic and damaging confusion in contemporary discussions of ideology which arises from the presence of two logically quite distinct ways of talking about the subject. These require—but seldom receive—quite distinct kinds of logical treatment. Perhaps I may make this distinction clear by an analogy: namely that of *health*.

(1) 'Healthiness' is a state or condition of an organism which is manifested in certain determinate ways: by a healthy complexion, by a healthy laugh, even by a healthy outlook on life etc. Apart from these manifestations, which are produced by the organism as a whole, there is no such 'thing' as healthiness: yet the manifestations of an organism's healthiness are not the healthiness itself; for healthiness is a concept logically quite distinct from those effects produced by the organism which manifest its state, or degree of healthiness. It is important to note that healthiness is a matter of *degree*: we can always say of an organism that at time t^1 it is healthier than it was at time t^2 (or unhealthier); but there is no such thing either as a total absence of healthiness, or a complete realisation of healthiness (at least in living mortal bodies).

(2) 'Freedom from disease', on the other hand, is not a matter of degree, at least in principle. For a disease denotes a certain identifiable and active agency which deforms the organism in certain determinate ways. We may want to say that the effects of a disease in an organism are more or less bad: but whether the organism has the disease or not is itself not a matter of degree. It is to be noted that it follows from the fact that a disease is an agent, that it can be subject of a transitive verb (e.g. 'deforms'): whereas 'unhealthiness' is not an agent and does not 'deform' anything.

'Healthiness' and 'Freedom from disease', then, are not logic-

ally parallel terms: they do different logical jobs. Let us consider some of the consequences of this distinction. Though a disease is distinct from the organism which has it, the symptoms of it are nevertheless produced by the diseased body itself. My measles-spots are symptoms of the disease measles, but they are products of my body, and as such are elements in the state of healthiness of my body. Yet *symptoms* of disease are logically distinct from *manifestations* of healthiness. Thus, an 'unhealthy complexion' is logically distinct from a 'diseased complexion', since of the latter I can always ask, Which disease(s) does it show symptoms of? (It makes no sense to ask, Which unhealthiness does it manifest?) Symptoms, then, are the effects in the body of discrete causes (e.g. a certain virus, a particular form of chemical breakdown, etc.) which can in principle be located by science: whereas the manifestations of healthiness simply indicate the general way the organism *is*. Again, it makes sense to conceive of a completely disease-free body, even if no such thing has ever yet existed: but it does not make sense, or the same sort of sense, to speak of a body that is completely free of unhealthiness. For in mortal bodies the process of physical dissolution which is the slow slide towards death would have to occur even in the absence of diseases. The man on the verge of death would be less healthy than he was in his prime, even in the absence of any particular diseases. Only in a body that was already exempt from death would the question of the person's degree of healthiness become redundant to the point of unintelligibility.

Now in Marxism today, 'ideology' is sometimes used to denote, as it were, the manifestations of a social formation's 'unhealthiness', but at other times it is used to indicate the symptoms of the social formation's diseases. Of course, it has to be insisted here, both in the case of the physical body and that of a body politic³, or social formation, that the manifestations of unhealthiness and the symptoms of the diseases that afflict it are not mere collections of separate items, but systematically interlock to affect each other. Just as all the symptoms of the various diseases I now have, taken together, form a system (because the underlying agen-

³ A 'body politic' here may denote a whole society or 'nation', or merely some segment of it (class, group etc.) I should further emphasise that the analogy between 'ideology' and 'unhealthiness' is here used solely to illustrate a *logical* point about the sorts of predicate which may be applied to the term 'ideology' and the logical consequences of confusion between them. I am not suggesting that ideology is simply the systematic manifestation of some inexplicable 'visitation' or 'infection' in the social formation; on the contrary it is a strictly explicable *product* of social formation.

cies which produce them in me are all intimately interlocked), so too the various manifestations of my heathiness must be taken together if any judgement is to be made as to my general health. Similarly, with that system of manifestations, or of symptoms, which is the social formation's ideology.

Now, confusion between the two senses of ideology occurs because, just as my pursuit of healthiness must very largely take the form, in this life, of a campaign to get rid of disease, so too the campaign to achieve the classless society must largely take the form of getting rid of the ideological deformations that afflict class society. Yet it remains true that complete freedom from the causes of ideological deformations is not the same thing as—to coin a barbarism which I shall not use again—complete 'non-ideologicality'. Let me take an example. Consider the following proposition:

'The peculiar complexity of English nineteenth-century ideology, founded on a complex conjuncture of bourgeois and aristocratic classes within the dominant bloc, lies in part in this contradictory unity between what Antonio Gramsci refers to as "organic" and "traditional" elements'. (Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, (page 102)

Here ideology is being used to indicate the whole ensemble of manifestations of a certain 'unhealthiness' of English bourgeois society in the nineteenth century: an 'unhealthiness' produced by the tension or 'contradictory unity' mentioned. This ensemble (to quote Marx) will take legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical forms in that society, and each of these forms will produce its own characteristic manifestations according to the kind of form it is. But it follows from *this* sense of ideology, that in a society *not* afflicted by the tension of essentially conflicting elements, the manifestations of 'unhealthiness' will be replaced by those of 'healthiness'. Just as an unhealthy body manifests its unhealthiness in an unhealthy complexion, an unhealthy laugh, an unhealthy outlook etc., so a healthy body will manifest itself in a healthy complexion, laugh, outlook, etc. Similarly, the 'unhealthy' (i.e. ideologically afflicted) social formation will manifest its 'unhealthiness' in the shape of 'unhealthy' laws, 'unhealthy' political institutions, 'unhealthy' religious practices and beliefs etc. And—inexorably according to the logic of *this* sense of ideology—the healthy (i.e. classless) society will exhibit its 'healthiness' in the shape of 'healthy' laws, institutions, religious beliefs etc. It also follows from this sense of ideology that only a society so transformed as to be exempt from those processes which correspond in the social formation to the processes of death in the som-

atic body, would cease to need, or be able to produce, ideology in this sense of the term: that is to say, would not need laws, political institutions, religion, art, philosophy etc. at all. Thus, in so far as the Marxist believes himself to be committed to holding that the classless society will be beyond *all* ideology, he is logically committed to a revolution which implies exactly what the Christian means by death and resurrection.

Of course Marxists will tend to resist this conclusion; and in doing so will be tempted systematically (if unwittingly) to confuse the above sense of ideology with the 'freedom from deformations' sense. Thus ideology now becomes that ensemble of symptoms of the activity of specific deforming agencies in the social formation, cure of which is promised by the advent of Marxist science. The Marxist scientist is like a doctor who, though diseased like everyone else, knows how to cure himself and his fellows, because the objectivity of his study of diseases is not affected by his having them himself. But if the Marxist, pursuing his campaign for curing society of its ideological deformations, identifies the ultimate triumph of his work (i.e. the completely deformation-free society) with the final abolition of ideology itself, he is making an elementary category-mistake. Quite plainly, the conclusion does not follow, for ideology in the 'healthiness' sense remains. Why then does the category mistake continue to be made?

The answer is surely that the Marxist believes that somehow the term 'ideology', being an abstract singular, must—ultimately in the last instance—denote a single idea, or concept. Because ideology is taken to be a sort of unity (which of course, in the 'healthiness' sense it can be, as long as the logical rules for using such a concept are observed), Marxism finds it necessary to interpret the apparently contradictory nature of ideology by applying to it contradictory predicates. Thus on the one hand, Marxism wants to say that ideology is not simply illusion: it is not simply false. Just as a hypochondriac may need his illnesses (he is unable to imagine life without them), so a class-society needs its ideologies: it cannot survive without them, indeed it cannot imagine life without them. Yet, on the other hand, just as the hypochondriac's illnesses really are illnesses, so the class-society's ideologies are real deformations that make it incapable of being really 'healthy'. Thus Marxism is pressed to say that ideology is both true and false, real and illusory at the same time: or if not that, then it says that the question of truth or falsity, reality or illusion, cannot be raised intelligibly: only in the 'healthy' classless future will it be possible clearly to ask, and answer, that question. Thus, I have heard it said that even the propositions of physics

are 'ideological' to some degree; and certainly that the religious proposition 'God exists' is ideological, and hence its truth value cannot intelligibly be discussed as long as we are in a bourgeois world. No doubt too, this is a useful manoeuvre for the none-too-courageous Marxist biologist faced by, say, the Lysenko controversy. He may well say, not that the Lysenko proposition is false, but that it is 'ideological' (i.e. Stalinist), and so avoid having to commit himself. (The scientific Marxist may say the same about the propositions of morality too—see below p. 100). But that way madness lies, because the manoeuvre is nonsense, and unnecessary. For the fact is that a predicate applied to the term ideology in the 'healthiness' sense may well be true while at the same time the *same* predicate applied to the term ideology in the 'freedom from disease' sense may be false. This is not because there is some special sort of proposition which hovers, as it were, between truth and falsity in an eerie region called the 'ideological', but simply because 'ideology' in sense (1) is not the same sort of logical subject as 'ideology' in sense (2). Obviously, in one sense, the hypochondriac would be 'healthier' (i.e. have fewer illnesses) if the doctor cured him: but equally obviously, if he cannot live without them, then he would in another sense be less healthy than he would be if the doctor left him alone. But now suppose that the doctor insists that healthiness must denote a single logical subject, covering both 'freedom from disease' and that state of being which is manifested in the signs of general well-being. Then the patient would be in trouble, because the doctor would be compelled both to administer and to refrain from administering his cure. In such a situation, it would not be surprising if the latter felt himself propelled towards using some gobbledegook about his remedies being both good and bad for the patient, or—more likely—about the inappropriateness of raising the question in this form until the patient had either died or recovered.

What effect does this analysis, if correct, have upon the relation of ideology to science in Marxism? Well, to begin with, corresponding to the two senses of ideology, there will be two senses of science.

(1) Corresponding to the 'disease' sense, science is the knowledge of the symptoms (forms of ideology) of the various diseases (e.g. conflict between forces and relations of production) that afflict the social formation, and of their causes and their cure. Marxist science is able to study the various forms in which ideology shows itself, the ways in which each form produces its own determinate ideological product, and how these relate systematically to each other. Armed with this knowledge, the Marxist science

is able, as it were, to prescribe a cure which will eventually ensure complete freedom from the diseases which afflict the social patient. The classless society is that post-revolutionary society which is disease-free, and Marxist science is the science of how to achieve this end.

(2) Corresponding to the 'health' sense of ideology, on the other hand, Marxist science will simply be the sort of transparent knowledge, or the capacity for such knowledge, which will be available once the deforming diseases of society and their symptoms in ideology have been eliminated. While this sort of knowledge is available only dimly and distortedly in the diseased world of present class-society, yet it is not altogether inconceivable even here and now for the doctor, even as he suffers from the common diseases *knows* how to cure them even if he doesn't know what the completely cured society will be like – and that knowledge, at any rate, is an example of the sort of knowledge that will eventually be possible generally throughout society.

Just as Marxism tends to confuse different sorts of predicates that can be applied to 'ideology', so too with 'science'. Thus, when Plekhanov says that there will be ideology in art even in the classless society, this does not necessarily mean that art will still be a deformation of reality; and when Ernst Fischer says that all art transcends the ideological limits of its time, he could be interpreted simply as implying that, like the diseased doctor who knows how to cure his own disease, all art has in it elements of scientific knowledge, i.e. that 'artistic knowledge is simply one sort of knowledge that will be available in the classless society.'⁴ In other words, ideology in *this* sense will always be necessary because the forms which ideology takes (legal, political, religious, aesthetic, philosophical etc.) provide sorts of knowledge (i.e. sorts of *science*) which cannot be had except *in* those forms, (short of the resurrected society that is beyond death).

This much is clear enough. But what of religious ideology? For now there is no reason why religious ideology, like art, should not flourish in the classless society, though of course it would have to be shorn of its deformations just as art would. If despite this consequence the Marxist wants to continue to insist that religion cannot provide genuine knowledge (i.e. it is nothing but deformation), then he must separate religion from the rest of ideology. But he cannot do this and continue, as Marx himself did, to regard religion as just one form of ideology alongside the other kinds. In other words, he must give up the basic planks of the whole Marxist

⁴Cf. Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, London 1976, p.17.

concept of ideology, namely that the ideology of a social formation (say, that of the English Nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, as mentioned above in the quotation of Eagleton)⁶ hangs together as a unity, a system of forms every element of which is necessary; a kind of seamless web thrown over the social formation as a whole. In short, *atheistic* Marxism cannot, logically, accommodate within its framework the 'health' sense of ideology: it is reduced to regarding each form of ideology as a separate 'disease', such that some 'diseases' are 'curable' while others (e.g. religion) are not.

The burden of my argument so far has been to show that, once the logical muddle over the two senses of ideology is cleared up, there is no reason why, on Marxist principles, there should not be a science of theology: i.e. a scientific critique of religious ideology which respects, and does not simply try to explain away, religious truth-claims. But what would such a science look like? Well, to begin with it would be concerned with drawing the line between the true and the false in Christianity.⁶ This is what Althusser, following Lenin, says is the master function of 'philosophical practice'.⁷ Scientific theology, then, is not a complete digest of Christian religious praxis: its concern is simply to provide criteria and draw boundaries. Secondly, theology will be a science as long as (a) its data come from genuine contact with reality and (b) its internal structure is logically coherent and contains what Althusser call 'definite protocols with which to validate the quality of its product'⁸

On the first point, it is worth noting the parallel between Althusser's conception of Marxist science and Aquinas's conception of theology for each sees that science receives its data from other 'practices'. Althusser puts it this way:

Theoretical practice falls within the general definition of practice. It works on raw materials (representations, concepts, facts) which it is given by other practices, whether

⁵Cf. above, p. 88

⁶Whether there could be a 'scientific theology' of other religions depends on whether other religions make truth claims which are valid or not. This is a question I have no space or competence to enter into: I merely confine myself to the Christian case in this discussion.

⁷*Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London, 1971, p. 23

⁸*Reading Capital*, p. 59

“empirical”, “technical” or “ideological”.⁹

Aquinas makes the same point:

sciences are of two kinds: some work from premises recognised in the innate light of intelligence, for instance arithmetic, geometry, and sciences of the same sort; while others work from premises recognised in the light of a higher science, for instance optics start from the principles marked out by geometry, and harmony from principles indicated by arithmetic. In this second manner is Christian theology a science, for it flows from founts recognised in the light of a higher science, namely God's own'. (Summ. Theol. 12. 1. 2)

That theology springs from sources outside itself then, does not *ipso facto* make it unscientific. The question at issue is whether the data are themselves knowledge. This is not the same as the question of whether they can be *proved* to be knowledge, for in every case the data are given prior to the theorizing which takes place in the scientific practice itself. Certain ‘paradigms’ have to be accepted, along with the facts, before it can be ascertained what it is to count as a ‘fact’ within the science. Further, some part of the data may themselves be ideological rather than scientific:

In its most general form theoretical practice does not only include *scientific* theoretical practice, but also pre-scientific theoretical practice, that is, ideological theoretical practice

⁹For Marx, London, 1969, p. 167. Althusser's theory that scientific knowledge is produced by the application of intellectual labour to certain raw materials, in the form of concepts and facts, is deeply obscure. Its purpose is to emphasise that knowledge is a productive process, and not simply a matter of ‘taking a look’ at either things or sense data or whatever. Yet, in the absence of any alternative example of how this process works, it is difficult for the reader to interpret this notion in any but the most rigorously empiricist sense. Thus, to take an example from the Communist Manifesto, the knowledge that ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’ is presumable produced by the application of intellectual labour to such ‘concepts as ‘history’, ‘class’, ‘society’ etc. This labour as it were re-orders the relations between these elements, or raw materials, to produce a new product: namely the above proposition, which embodies the true relation between these elements (replacing the more or less false relations between them that had hitherto prevailed among bourgeois historians). But if we are to take this theory as anything more than a metaphorical way of emphasising the ‘produced’ nature of knowledge, then we must include such essential concepts as ‘all’ and ‘hitherto’ as bits of the raw material along with ‘class’, ‘society’ etc. The only theory I know of which seriously takes such concepts as these as objects of acquaintance which can be ‘re-ordered’ by the mind to produce new knowledge, is that of the notorious empiricist Bertrand Russell. (See for example, *Problems of Philosophy* pp. 199ff.) Russell's theory rests upon the thesis that knowing the meaning of a word is acquaintance with an object that the word stands for – a thesis which, as Geach has shown, is self-contradictory in application. (See Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* p. 48). It seems to me inescapable that Althusser's theory, if taken seriously, entails just the same notions and is open to just the same objections, as Russell's.

(the forms of 'knowledge' that make up the pre-history of a science and their 'philosophies').¹⁰

But can it be said that the sources of theology are themselves knowledge? Clearly not if Marxism holds to the view that there cannot be a God. This is indeed the point at which, as Francis Barker says, the two forms of discourse are at cross purposes (because, of course, the Marxist discourse embodies the confusion about the meaning of 'ideology' and of 'science' already discussed). But what are the arguments Marxism mounts for the rejection of God? Well, one form of argument can surely be dismissed at once: this is the argument that (to quote Barker) 'God is a being who exists outside of history (which means for Marxism of course that he doesn't exist)..' (p. 408) For history, as Marxism understands it, is produced by men. In this sense, almost the whole course of the cosmos is outside history: but this is hardly an argument for its non-existence. Is it then because God is a *person* that he cannot exist, since persons at any rate can only exist within history? But this would make the question of personal existence on other planets meaningless: and I know of no argument within Marxism for such a conclusion. Is it then because God is said to be a person but one who has no temporal or spatial location? This brings us to the question of whether, and in what sense, Marxism implies a materialist ontology, that is to say, a belief that – again in the last analysis? – only matter exists. But if this is a question for Marxists, it is not one that has had a convincing answer in post-Althusserian Marxism. The fact is that Marxism has never bothered itself with the possibility of personal life existing elsewhere than in the species *homo sapiens*: since such 'fantasies' have had little significance in the history of class struggles, except as diversions from the main task. Yet the question cannot be ignored, least of all by science, while unfortunately the most attractive arguments against such 'fantasies' – those of logical positivism – are as fatal to Marxism as they are to theology.

Logical positivism argued that the concept of God was meaningless. But this was not Marx's view, or Feuerbach's. Feuerbach used the term God in perfectly meaningful sentences all the time:

(Man) sets God over himself as an opposed being. God is not what man is, and man is not what God is. God is the infinite being, man the finite; God is perfect, man is imperfect; God is eternal, man is temporal; God is almighty, man is powerless; God is holy, man is sinful. God and man are extremes:

¹⁰For Marx, loc. cit.

God is the absolutely positive, the essence of all realities while man is the negative, the essence of nothingness.¹¹

While much of this is false from the point of view of theological science (which denies that man is powerless, or the essence of nothingness) it makes sense: and certainly made sense to Marx who took it over and turned it into a materialist critique of religion. But in using Feuerbach's theory of alienation and projection to explain the illusory nature of religion, Marx unfortunately took over the theologically unscientific elements that were embedded in it, as if they were essential to Christianity itself. (This was almost inevitable given the atmosphere of liberal protestantism in which Marx grew up, and given the record of Christianity as he knew it). The substantive point here is that the God of scientific theology *cannot* logically be thought of as the alien presence over against man which is posited by both Feuerbach and Marx. For God in scientific theology is first cause: and as such is the cause of everything in the world, including those factors which bring about the very projection and alienation which 'man' (Feuerbach) or 'the world of men, the State and society' (Marx) find themselves trapped in. Whatever it is that stands over against men as an opposed being, it is not God but some sort of idol. Further, since 'cause' in scientific theology – pace Barker¹² – means a being who is known from his effects, it follows that as first cause God is present in his creatures, for the cause is always present in its effects. Far from being an alien and opposed being, the God of scientific theology is closer to his creatures, especially to those capable of being aware of him, than they are to themselves.

Marx's own argument against the possibility of God, then, misfires: it is merely an argument against idolatry, (religious ideology). Might it not be said, however, that modern scientific knowledge has shown that the data of theology, in Bible and Tradition, have become today incapable of sustaining the sort of thinking which is necessary for a science of theology to be possible? Here we are at the heart of what Newman called the problem of 'development' in doctrines: how far can scientific theology accommodate historical development in other sciences?

¹¹ *Works*, ed. F. Jodl, 2nd Ed. (Stuttgart Vol vi p.41, quoted in Copleston, *History of Philosophy*. Vol vii pp. 296-97.

¹² Barker (loc cit) seeks to show that in religion, terms such as 'because' are used 'paradigmatically' and not 'syntagmatically' as in science. For an argument that this is the exact opposite of how 'cause' is used in scientific theology, see my *The Story-Shaped World*, Part I passim. (Athlone Press, London, 1975)

Now Newman's own answer to this question – worked out at almost the very moment when Marxism was developing from a humanism to a science, in the mid eighteen-forties – is interesting precisely because he tried to combine a notion of how doctrines are 'produced' in history (i.e. not just given, but made) with an equal insistence on the scientific nature of theology itself. 'Religious doctrine is knowledge, in as full a sense as Newton's doctrine is knowledge' he said.¹³ Furthermore, the overreaching role of theology in a university education implied the capacity to offer 'symptomatic readings' of the findings of other disciplines, based upon its superior viewpoint as a science, without in any way limiting their own autonomy.

Newman's work was valuable in that he saw the need to evolve criteria from within the science of theology itself, for distinguishing between the true and the false, the authentic from the inauthentic development in the ever-continuing process of producing theological knowledge. The crucial thing to recognise is that the *Essay on Development* is not the defence of a 'vision' (to use Barker's phrase) but the sketch of a theory of theological production. It is based on the view that theology is knowledge, that theologising is a scientific praxis, that the production of theological knowledge is an historical process in which men use determinate means and raw material to produce new knowledge, and that the praxis of theology contains within itself definite protocols whereby to distinguish truth from falsity, knowledge from ideological deformations, within its own domain.¹⁴ Of course what it lacks, crucially, is any clear sense of the material causes of the developments in doctrine that it traces and discusses. For example, in discussing the way in which the empire, heralded and made the way easier for Christianity in the first centuries, Newman remarks:

Changes in society are, by a providential appointment, commonly preceded and facilitated by the setting of a

¹³ *Idea of a University*, Discourse 2:9

¹⁴ Newman gives seven tests for distinguishing true from false developments in doctrine. These are tests of *content* or *form*: but his thesis also requires for its own internal consistency, as a minimum I think, that the science of theology observes the following rules:

- a) 'God' is used as a common noun ('nomen naturae'), not as a proper name.
- b) God is understood as first cause of the world.
- c) 'Cause' is understood in a transitive sense: cause is not a Humean correlation, but an agent asserting itself.
- d) All terms predicated of God must be used analogically (except where they are used metaphorically). (See my *The Story-Shaped World*, Part I).

certain current in man's thoughts and feelings in that direction towards which a change is to be made.¹⁵ but Newman does not ask himself why this should be so (if it is so) or what sort of processes cause it to be so. Indeed, the very concept of a 'providential appointment' seems to make such a question redundant. Here we have a case, it seems to me, of the scientific theologian's work being hindered by the ideology of the very religion he is defending: an ideology he is himself deeply embedded in despite his scientific attitude. Yet this does not prevent his work being scientific as far as it goes, as long as it rests firmly upon the criteria of such science. And, of course, asking for an underlying explanation, at the level of base rather than super-structure, for the various developments in Christian doctrine, is very much easier than providing one.¹⁶

I have mentioned Newman because, however inadequate his answers may be, his work shows that it is not as easy as it might seem for the Marxist to dismiss the notion of a theological science on the grounds that it is simply unhistorical. This being so, we still have to ask ourselves, Why is it that Marxism needs to persist in the misrepresentation of Christianity to which I have already alluded?¹⁷

It seems to me that it is here that the question of Marxism and morality becomes crucial, especially for the 'scientific' Marxist in the Althusser tradition. There is no great difficulty, in a sense, for the Marxist who sees himself as a humanist, to accept this point. Thus, Machovec insists that the moral question of pacifism and violence is the crux between Christians and Marxists: but he tries to solve it by insisting that

(Marx's) concept of violence had nothing in common with the heedless shedding of blood, the arbitrary use of force (frequent with the powerful) or the principles of 'temporarily' suspended human rights.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (ed. J.M.Cameron, Penguin Books, 1974) Ch. IV: i, p. 244.

¹⁶ But see Milan Machovec: *A Marxist Looks at Jesus* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), reviewed in *New Blackfriars* Nov. 1976, and also a number of Marxist works on early Christianity reviewed in *New Blackfriars* Vol 57 No 672 (May, 1976) pp.234 ff. for recent works in this field.

¹⁷ On the failure of Marxism to 'develop' its theory about religion to any notable extent, see Adrian Cunningham, *Marx and Religion The Ethnological Notebooks 1880-82 in Religion*, Vol 6 (Spring, 1976) pp. 99-114.

¹⁸ *op. cit.* p. 33

Well and good: but Machovec does not provide any philosophical underpinning for this position, or any clues as to how just violence is to be distinguished from unjust on humanistic Marxist premises. Similarly, Kolakowski's remark that

When a man is dying of hunger and you can give him something to eat, there is no combination of circumstances in which it would be right to say: "It would be tactically better to let him die"¹⁹

is remarkable for its absoluteness, but raises all sorts of questions from a scientific point of view. On the face of it, it does not even seem to me to be true. But in any case, these moral propositions come from men who (to quote Machovec) interpret Marxist materialism as 'the supremacy of man and of the human principle in the cosmos', and who are not even sure whether this necessarily rules out belief in God or not.²⁰ Their Marxism is on the other side of the 'epistemological break' from the Marxist science (and indeed from the theological science) which we are here discussing. And for the scientific Marxist it seems, to quote Francis Barker, that the question of morality is simply the question whether one should support a particular slogan in a particular situation.²¹ Yet according to scientific Marxism, as well to the classical tradition in moral thought, morality (to use Denys Turner's formulation, agreed by Barker) is 'a scientific investigation of the social order which can generate norms for action. 'Well, to begin with how can such a concept of morality be reduced to the mere support of slogans? I see no reason for disagreeing with Turner's formulation, except that the science of theology, unlike that of Marxism, will insist that the social order in question must include God. For if Christianity is true, than God enters into social relations with men in history, supremely so in Christ. Thus no account of a society can be scientific if it leaves out the working of the Holy Spirit in that society. Christian morality, then, is not a set of a-historical prescriptions, but an attempt to answer the question, 'How should I act, given the facts?' – but always remembering, among the relevant facts, the facts of what God has said and done in history. For

¹⁹in *Die Mensch ohne Alternative*, Munich 1964, p. 248, quoted in Machovec, op. cit. p. 12

²⁰Machovec, op. cit. p. 21

²¹see Barker, in *New Blackfriars* Vol 57 No 676 (September, 1976) p.413 discussing the slogan 'Torture is wrong'.

instance, that we must love our neighbour as ourselves, is not a *slogan* for, but a *fact* about, the situation we are in. Similarly, pace Barker 'torture is wrong' is not a slogan but a fact: that is to say, torture is something that is *forbidden*. So this is what theological science in the moral sphere is about: producing and establishing knowledge about what is or is not forbidden or commanded by the presence of God's love within the social order. Naturally, this sort of knowledge will be produced by men using the means available. The notion of a static morality is clearly impossible for a scientific theology. But the point is that the logic of such a discourse will be that it is possible, by investigating the nature of human society in its history, including the presence of God's love within this history, to know that there are certain forms of behaviour which are demanded or ruled out.

But it might be said, why bring God into all this? Is it not possible to make an analysis of human love which would demonstrate that torture, say, is wrong, without resort to any divine dimension? This, I take it, is the burden of Eagleton's attempt to provide a Marxist reason for ruling out torture (a reason, incidentally, which Barker rejects without providing any alternative).²² The answer is surely this: that what makes torture wrong is not our love for each other (indeed, this is just what provides all the good arguments *for* torture: Orwell was in a sense right, like the Inquisition, to regard torture as a function of the Ministry of Love) but the fact that God loves both torturer and victim equally. The alleged need to torture people is always the result of some sort of fear, and is rooted in trust of man's devices rather than God's. And what casts out such fear, and makes superfluous that trust, is God's love for us. As I recall Herbert McCabe saying once: on gospel principles, it is crazy to trust man. But for all its theoretical 'decentering' of man, in its account of the forces which shape history, Marxist science still shows its trust to be in man precisely in its reduction of moral prohibitions to slogans. (A reduction it shares, incidentally, with a good deal of 'liberal' Oxford moral philosophy). As Eagleton says, in trying to de-centre God the atheist revolutionary, such as Milton's Satan, only sets up a substitute kingdom centred on himself.²³ (This is a process eloquently alluded to in Machovec's all-too-significantly circum-spect references to the Stalinist regime which has tried to make his Marxist-Christian dialogue as difficult as possible). But perhaps

²² *op.cit.* p. 412-13

²³ 'Decentering God' in *New Blackfriars* Vol 57 No 671 (August, 1976) p. 150

the most significant move that the scientific Marxist makes, in trying to escape the inevitable onset of theology in the discussion of morality, is the one Eagleton makes at the end of his argument, and Barker applauds:

Like Christ before Pilate,

marxism has little to say about "morality" *directly*: it is silent because the material conditions which would make such discourse possible do not yet fully exist.²⁴

This, of course, is only another case of the logical confusion about ideology leading to a plea not to raise an awkward question. Certainly you don't debate moral questions with people who 'can only conceive of morality moralistically'. But this is not to say that the gospel conception of morality is to be found in its silences, but that it is found in its realistic assessment of the *facts*:

Remember I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as serpents and yet as harmless as doves. Beware of men: they will hand you over to sanhedrins, and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say: what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, because it is not you who will be speaking, the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

It is such realistic assessment of the facts as this that compels the Christian to recognise the folly of trusting in men rather than in God, and to see that it is only through a recognition that the 'facts' include the presence of the Holy Spirit among men that the consequences of such folly can be avoided.

²⁴*New Blackfriars*, Vol 56 No 655 (October, 1975) p. 470