

Christian experience apart. It is still possible for a bishop to define his ecclesial consciousness by an *a priori* which excludes from it ingredients felt to be part of the ordinary texture of human life by many lay people and theologians; it is perfectly possible for a theologian to put an exaggerated value on such ingredients and make them part of his working definition of the *humanum* (to use Schillebeeckx's term), a *humanum* endorsed in Jesus Christ. While this continues to be the case, presuppositions, perspectives, the whole feel and texture of life, must continue to differ and conflicts must arise; perhaps these conflicts need to be institutionalized and ritualized. I confess that I do not find this prospect pleasing, in part at least because I cannot take theologians (as distinct from their theology) all that seriously. Certainly if theologians are to form associations to promote 'openness' in the Church, they will have to do so on behalf of the Church as a whole and not just on their own behalf. What I should regret would be if such ritualized conflict merely intensified an obsession with authority in the Church which has marked Roman Catholicism for centuries: a mystique of the monarchical principle countered by a mystique of the democratic principle. I do not believe Christianity is about authority.

## A Contribution to Christian Materialism

by John Allcock

The debate between Christians and Marxists has been under way now for more than a decade. Christians are admitting that they have in the past been too wrapped up in the institutional forms of religion, and that they have perhaps been seduced from the Gospel by the success of the institutional Church. Marxists, in similar vein, admit that they have in turn been too ready to castigate the outward forms of religious organization, and too little prepared to give consideration to the central message of the Gospels and the prophets. Here too the exigencies of party organization have brought about the same displacement of goals found in the Church. Each declares that the other has far more to offer than they had previously either suspected or been prepared to admit.<sup>1</sup> The unhappy feature of the Christian/Marxist dialogue is that in ten years or so

<sup>1</sup>Examples of this kind of interchange are readily available in a number of sources. See, for example, J. Klugmann and P. Oestreicher (eds.), *What Kind of Revolution? A Christian-Communist Dialogue*, Panther Books, 1968.

it does not seem to have progressed very far beyond 'programme statements', or declarations of intent, of this kind. The concrete and substantive advances made in debate appear to have been quite disproportionate to the expectations held of it. In particular, the development of a really coherent 'Christian materialism', hoped for by many participants in the debate, has not been realized.

One is compelled to ask *why* such an initially promising line of philosophical enquiry should have provided such meagre results. Is it that we were mistaken after all in thinking that progress could be made here? Is it that Christianity and Marxism in fact have nothing to say to each other beyond that which has already been said? Are they, in the last analysis, incompatible systems of thought?

It is the contention of this essay that so little has been achieved by way of the development of a genuinely original and workable Christian materialism *because so little attention has been paid in the discussion to the problems of the nature and place of man*. Christians and Marxists alike have been much more ready to talk about 'Christianity' and 'Marxism', 'religion' and 'philosophy', than they have been to discuss *man*. The prospects for Christian materialism must inevitably remain limited and uninspiring for as long as this situation continues.

This neglect is particularly surprising in a discussion which revolves around the work of Marx. Surely the dynamic core of Marx's philosophy is its distinctive *anthropology*—its understanding of the nature of man. This is encapsulated, for example, in one of the best-known passages from Marx's work:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. . . .

The first premise of human history is, of course, the existence of living, human individuals.<sup>1</sup>

There is only one place from which to begin a philosophy that is both materialistic and humanistic, and that is *with the nature and condition of man*.

In more recent years, in this country, the group which at one time centred on the journal *Slant* has seriously attempted to face up to these problems, of relating a Christian and a Marxist view of man. While their attempt has been impressive, and undoubtedly of importance in the approach to the task of establishing a viable Christian materialism, a number of key problems and difficulties remain which are usually either avoided or simply not appreciated. Since these issues are not merely peripheral, but strike at the roots

<sup>1</sup>K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Publishers, New York, 1963, pp. 6-7.

of any attempt to develop a view of man which is both Christian and Marxist, since they relate to the central concepts and propositions in terms of which such a view is formulated, it is important that we address ourselves to them at the outset of the enterprise.

\* \* \*

### *Production and Creation*

The concept of man at the heart of Marxian philosophy emphasizes man as an *active* being.<sup>1</sup> In particular, man *produces* the means of his subsistence; and it is this productive activity which provides the focus for the understanding of the complex totality of human existence. 'The mode of production of material life', wrote Marx, 'determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life.'<sup>2</sup>

This starting point in production implies two aspects. Firstly, man 'labours'—in other words, he is engaged in the transformation of the natural world around him. Secondly, and far more significantly, through his labour *man transforms himself*. Labour is, for Marx, a collective and social activity. To engage in production therefore involves individuals, not only in reproducing the means of their physical subsistence, but in sharing together a way of life, as a totality. Marx puts the matter succinctly in a later part of the passage already quoted:

The mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce.

The writing of history must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of man.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, as the mode of production is transformed historically, so man's mode of life, and indeed *man himself*, is also transformed.

This brings us to a very important point about the nature of Marxian materialism—and to a consideration which is central to any projected Christian materialism also. Marxists have always been at pains to insist on the difference between 'vulgar' or 'meta-

<sup>1</sup>This emphasis, on the active nature of man, is neither exclusive to Marxism, nor does it originate there. Kant, for example, had already stressed that human understanding cannot be understood as a passive mirror which merely reflects the pattern of things, but that the 'mind' is an active agency, which itself composes the data of sense experience into some kind of order. The premise of activity is also one of the cardinal assumptions of pragmatism.

<sup>2</sup>K. Marx, in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, quoted in T. B. Bottomore and M. Rubel (eds.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

physical' materialism, and their own interpretation of it. It was with the critique of earlier forms of materialism that Marx himself set out on his philosophical career.<sup>1</sup> The materialism to which Marx opposed himself was the simple insistence on our ability to explain everything by *direct* reference to material or physical reality. In particular Marx criticized the tendency of earlier materialism to base itself on the capacities and physiological processes of *individual* men, taken in isolation; a materialism which finds its point of origin in the physiology of perception and cognition. A materialistic philosophy of this type, Marx would argue, does not base itself upon *real* men, but on an abstraction, for the simple reason that *there are no non-social men*—nor have there ever been.<sup>2</sup> There are, and always have been, men engaged collectively in labour—transforming nature around them, and through this collective enterprise laying the foundation for the continual transformation of their own nature.

The essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each separate individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.<sup>3</sup>

The point at issue here is that a meaningful concept of human nature must be rooted, not in a static set of categories defined in terms of human physiology, but in a notion of man's *becoming*—a set of *historical* concepts. It is for this reason that Gramsci believed that 'Man's nature is "history" '<sup>4</sup>; and this is why Marxists have always designated their philosophy as 'historical materialism'.

Within the body of Christian philosophy the nearest equivalent to the Marxian starting point in 'labour', or 'production', is the emphasis on 'creation'. The Bible begins with the creation of man—but of central significance here is the biblical insistence that man is made in the image of God. Since God is, first and foremost, a creator, an extremely important logical consequence of this position, which appears to have been either unrecognized or very much underrated by Marxist Christians so far,<sup>5</sup> is that man too is creative.

The notion of 'creation' conveyed by the first two chapters of Genesis does not refer to creation *ex nihilo*, but to the *transformation*

<sup>1</sup>In the 'Theses on Feurbach' (Bottomore and Rubel, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-4) Marx refers to this distinction in terms of the 'old', or 'contemplative', materialism and the 'new' materialism. An extended and detailed documentation of Marx's early struggle to define his own position in this respect is contained in S. Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, Ann Arbor 1962 (first pub. 1950). The development of this position by Engels, Lenin and subsequent Soviet writers is dealt with in G. A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>The view to which Marx opposed himself is summed up epigrammatically, but extremely, in Feurbach's, 'Man is what he eats'. Such simple reductionism has been lampooned by Gramsci as leading to the belief that, 'if one knew what a man had eaten before he made a speech one could better interpret the speech itself'. (See A. Gramsci, 'What is Man?', in *The Modern Prince, and Other Essays*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1957, p. 79.)

<sup>3</sup>Marx, 'Theses on Feurbach', *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup>A. Gramsci, *op. cit.*, p. 80. See also H. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, Jonathan Cape, 1968, 'Historical Materialism', pp. 60ff.

<sup>5</sup>See A. Cunningham, *Adam*, Sheed and Ward, 1968; T. Eagleton, *The Body as Language*, Sheed and Ward, 1970.

of matter. Two separate but closely related emphases are clearly distinguishable in the biblical account of creation. Firstly, there is the idea of creation as the development of new forms, and the imparting of pattern and order to that which was previously formless or chaotic. Secondly, creation implies, on the part of the creator, *control* of the natural environment, or the medium that is being worked. (In the words of the Bible, to create means to 'have dominion . . . over the earth'.) Human creativity, the creativity of man made in the image of God, is characterized by these two aspects. Clearly the biblical notion of creation and the Marxian concept of labour have a great deal in common.<sup>1</sup>

'Production' and 'creation' are *not*, however, simply equivalent concepts relating to the nature of man, although they do have this point of similarity. While man's *knowledge of God* is seen in the Bible as developing historically, there is clearly no indication in the biblical anthropology that 'man makes himself'—that there is a historical process in which *human nature itself* is transformed through man's action upon nature. The story of Adam is not a historical moment in the development of mankind, but a representation of some aspect of the *universal* condition of man.

This brings us to what is probably the major difficulty in reconciling these two approaches to man. For while Christianity has always addressed itself to the universal aspects of the human condition, unbounded by historical era or social class, Marxism denies the existence of such universals, maintaining that belief in them is rooted in an essentialist metaphysics which overlooks or denies the historical and dialectical quality of human nature. The significance of this point is more readily appreciated through a brief discussion of the Marxian concept of 'alienation', in relation to the Christian idea of a 'fall' of man.

### *Alienation*

The term 'alienation' has received an increasing amount of attention over the past decade, particularly in the English-speaking world.<sup>2</sup> Possibly the notion of 'alienation' has become rather overexposed these days, and it is usually used rather loosely. At best

<sup>1</sup>This argument is given weight, I feel, by the fact that the Marxist theoretician Ernst Fischer finds his theory of artistic creation on the theory of labour. See his *The Necessity of Art*, Penguin Books, 1963, Chap. 2. In the work already referred to (note 4 p. 563) Lefebvre goes so far as to say that, 'Man is creative activity . . .'. (*Op. cit.*, p. 148.)

<sup>2</sup>The 'rediscovery' of alienation in this country was triggered off by Bottomore's translation of Marx's early writings. (Published as *Marx's Concept of Man*, edited and with an introduction by Erich Fromm, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961. Also, T. B. Bottomore, *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, C. A. Watts & Co., 1963.) These were brought into prominence by the general reshaping of the Marxist movement which has been under way since the late 1950s. Today many prominent Marxist thinkers set out on their exposition of Marx's thought from 'alienation', emphasizing the more liberal elements in the Marxian perspective, in preference to the concern with patterns of historical change—the 'iron determination of history'—which had been the focus of earlier expositions of Marxism. Possibly the most popular writer in this respect has been Herbert Marcuse. See, in particular, his *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, 2nd ed., Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954.

it is frequently used to indicate a highly romantic and metaphysical view of 'natural man', with which Marx would have had little sympathy. At worst it passes as a fashionable synonym for a general and unspecific dissatisfaction with 'the system', a feeling of *ennui*, or of estrangement, all detached from any specific analytic purpose. We will try to avoid these pitfalls by defining at the outset what is meant by 'alienation' in the original Marxian use of the term.

As we have already observed, Marx's understanding of man departs from the insistence that man produces his world—not only a world of material objects, but also of ideas, forces and social institutions. In very general terms, 'alienation' refers to a condition in which men fail to recognize that these products—objects, ideas, etc.—*are* human creations, and falsely endow them with a life and power of their own. The nodal form of alienation is seen as being the alienation of labour. Expressed simply: man, through his labour, produces objects; but under certain conditions these cease to be objects for the use and fulfilment of the producer, and they become *commodities*. When objects become commodities, the relationship of men to these objects is no longer regulated by human need, but by *prices*. Through the sale of labour itself as a commodity, the relationship of men to each other is also transmuted into market relations. Men cease to see, in the forces of the market, the consequences of their own acts of valuation: prices seem to be impersonal qualities inhering in the objects themselves, or even possessing their own independent life. So the relations of men to objects, and to each other, seem to be shaped in the market by 'alien' forces, which men no longer recognize as the operation of their own wills.

The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.<sup>1</sup>

Marx compares this situation to primitive idolatry; and in his later works he refers to this process of the alienation of labour as the 'fetishism of commodities'.<sup>2</sup> Erich Fromm has summarized Marx conveniently for us on this point:

The essence of what the prophets call 'idolatry' is not that man worships many gods instead of only one. It is that idols are the work of man's own hands—they are things, and man bows down and worships things. . . . He transfers to the things of his creation the attributes of his own life, and instead of experiencing

<sup>1</sup>K. Marx, quoted in Bottomore and Rubel, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>See K. Marx, *Capital*, Progress Publishers, 1965, Vol. I, pp. 71-83. It is easy to see how the nature of idolatry has become so significant in the theology of the Catholic left, in the light of this connexion. See, for example, Cunningham, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-39.

himself as the creating person, he is in touch with himself only by the worship of the idol.<sup>1</sup>

For our present purposes two points of emphasis emerge from this account of alienation. Firstly, this 'fetishism' has its origins in the character of the productive processes of society; but because of the primacy of these productive relations in shaping all other aspects of life, this primary alienation spreads through the political, intellectual and spiritual life of society. Secondly, alienation is not a *necessary* concomitant of the fact of labour: only of a particular type of labour associated with commodity production, and reaching its fullest expression in the capitalist system. In other words, alienation, as an aspect of the human condition, is seen by Marx as *historically specific and determinate*. It comes into being with the development of commodity production—with the first emergence of exploitation. It is expected that the alienated condition of humanity will reach its historical term with the demise of capitalism.

It follows, from the relationship between alienated labour and private property, that the emancipation of society from private property, from servitude, takes the political form of the emancipation of the working class, not in the sense that only the latter's emancipation is involved, but because this emancipation includes the emancipation of humanity as a whole. For all human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all the types of servitude are only modifications or consequences of this relation.<sup>2</sup>

And later in the same discussion:

The positive abolition of private property . . . is thus the positive abolition of all alienation, and thus the return of man from religion, the family, the State, etc., to his human, i.e. *social*, life.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, while the condition described by Marx is a general and pervasive one under existing social and economic conditions, it must in no way be regarded as part of a *universal* human nature. Alienation is merely one historical phase in the development of humanity, which in time will be superseded.<sup>4</sup>

### *Alienation and Sin*

The parallels between this concept of alienation, and the picture of man described in biblical anthropology as the 'fall' of man, are initially impressive. From the outset the authors of the Genesis

<sup>1</sup>Erich Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Irving Zeitlin suggests that a similar point is made by Paul Tillich in his, *Der Mensch im Christentum und im Marxismus*. See, I. M. Zeitlin, *Marxism: A Re-Examination*, D. van Nostrand Co. Inc., 1967, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>From the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, quoted in Bottomore and Rubel, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 250. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>4</sup>This point is also the basis for the Marxist critique of contemporary sociology. See my article, 'Sociologische Modelle des Menschen', in *Internationale Dialog Zeitschrift*, 3. Jahrgang, 1970, 2, pp. 138-48.

stories recognized that there are limits which must be placed on the postulate of creativity. If this were the whole story behind the understanding of man, then human history would have consisted of a smooth and ordered, conflict-free, linear process. One needs to be neither a Christian nor a Marxist to realize that this is far from the truth. There is a dark side to the human condition which must be reconciled with the first, creative, side; for the experience of man in the Garden gave him the knowledge of both good *and* evil.

The concept of 'sin' is variously interpreted by theologians; but it seems that there are two points which at the outset can be made without major controversy. Firstly, the biblical concept of 'sin' is not principally concerned with individual misdemeanours—sins—but with a total condition of humanity. 'Sin' is not so much what people do as what they are, in the Bible. Hence the drama of salvation is enacted, not so much because individuals do wrong, but because humanity is sinful. The former is a mere symptom of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, sin has to do with human choice. Man has knowledge of good and evil; but this is no passive knowledge acquired through reflection. Man actively chooses between good and evil, and indeed his knowledge comes about through making such choices. As Cunningham has pointed out, it is not simply that the possession of such knowledge *caused* man to fall,<sup>2</sup> the emphasis must lie on the fact of choice.

This brings us to the relationship of the notion of 'sin' to the Marxian outlook on 'alienation'; for 'sin' is not an external power imposed upon man from without, but a human power. Sin exists because of man: it comes into the world because of human choice. (There can be no sin without man to be sinful: it cannot exist as a kind of disembodied essence apart from man.<sup>3</sup>) In man's sinful state a part of man's powers stand opposed to him, and he experiences *himself* as an alien force, compelling him from without. The confession of St Paul depicts the situation with admirable clarity.

I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do, but what I detest. . . . The good which I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed (as with Marx's idea of 'alienation'), although sin continues

<sup>1</sup>A similar point is made by Ernst Cassirer, in his *Essay on Man* (Yale University Press, paperback ed. 1962, p. 107). Here he argues that the distinct advance made by the prophetic books of the Old Testament over the earlier tribal notions of 'taboo' lies in the insistence that 'even human actions, as such, are no longer regarded as pure or impure. The only purity that has a religious significance and dignity is purity of the heart': in other words, purity of the *total being*.

<sup>2</sup>See Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that we are concerned here with the nature of *sin*, and not of *evil*. I do not wish to digress at this juncture into a discussion of the complex problem of theodicy. This important distinction is not always clearly maintained. Cunningham, for example (*op. cit.*, pp. 135-8), plainly confuses the two notions.

<sup>4</sup>Romans 7: 15, 19 (*New English Bible*).



to operate through the action of the human will, it cannot be thrown off simply by the exercise of the will. Men continue to be imprisoned in sin in spite of their conscious striving to be free. St Paul once again sums up the situation vividly:

In my inmost self I delight in the law of God, but I perceive that there is in my bodily members a different law, fighting against the law that my reason approves and making me a prisoner under the law that is in my members, the law of sin. Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me from this body doomed to death?<sup>1</sup>

And Paul is in no doubt that sin *is* fully a part of human nature: throughout the following chapter his repeated references to our 'lower nature' indicate that this is fully a part of our humanity, though in contradiction with the other part.

Here, however, lies the nub of the difficulty of equating 'sin' with 'alienation': for once again we are confronted with the unavoidable fact that 'sin' is regarded by the biblical writers as a human *universal*. Unlike 'alienation', 'sin' is *not* historically circumscribed; its advent is not dependent upon the emergence of certain economic structures; nor is the victory over 'sin' envisaged as a historical event, in the normal use of that word. The ready identification of 'sin' with 'alienation' by Christian Marxists has usually implied the existence of an important blind spot on this aspect of the issue.

### *The significance of language*

It is not enough, at this juncture, simply to assume incompatibility between Christianity and Marxism, and to close discussion. Indeed, with the specification of a problem of this kind the dialogue should be opened rather than closed. It is possible to take the debate a stage further by pressing each side to a re-examination of their positions. For the points of incompatibility which we have uncovered in the foregoing discussion are (on further examination) among the *weaker* points in their respective understandings of man.

Let us turn briefly again to Marx's ideas, and to his insistence on the historical relativity of alienation. For men to engage in co-operative production it is necessary for them to develop, not only the means of production, but also the *means of co-operation*. The most general of these, and the most essential, will be the development of some form of communication. It is not possible to imagine a human society without labour—certainly: but it is equally impossible to imagine one without *language*.

We are not trying to advocate, at this point, a simple cultural determinism in opposition to a simple economic determinism. We are merely suggesting that 'labour' and 'culture' are *not*, in fact, separable categories, except artificially. This is the root of the

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, vv. 22-4.

difficulty of the classic Marxian statement of the problem of alienation, however; for a study of the nature of language reveals that *any adequate understanding of language must take as its starting point something very close to alienation.*

Language involves learning: but it is important to note that this is not simply a matter of acquiring a string of isolated words. Language involves the use of *rules*: it is a type of rule-governed behaviour. A language which has no rules (a private language) is by definition not a language.<sup>1</sup> The ability to follow rules is a properly *social* development in humanity, and not simply a psychological phenomenon. It is of a different order from the rat's ability to learn to run a maze, or a pigeon's ability to learn to peck at coloured discs. The ability to abide by the rules involves our learning to see ourselves from the perspective of others: to make judgments about one's own behaviour from a point of view *shared* with others.<sup>2</sup>

In a vocabulary more familiar to Marx, rule-governed behaviour involves the individual's ability to see himself, and others, *as an object*.<sup>3</sup> To use language we must subject ourselves to forces which are indisputably of human origin (the rules) but which stand over against us as if external and impersonal, constraining us to act or refrain from acting in a certain manner. Moreover, to participate in language (without which we are never fully human) we must align ourselves with these forces. This is precisely the situation which Marx describes as 'alienation'.

The implication of this argument is that, at least in some respects, alienation is not merely a historically specific and dispensable, but a general and necessary part of the human condition. This does not, of course, undermine the *whole* of the Marxian position. For linguistic behaviour, unlike labour, does not produce objects; the 'product' of such behaviour cannot be expropriated from its producers. Language remains the property of all, unlike commodities. What is called into question in the position advocated by Marx, however, is the *absoluteness* with which alienation is linked to certain historical periods, and the assumption that it can be *totally* overcome in any future revolutionary development. In short, Marxists are

<sup>1</sup>This aspect of language is under-estimated by both Eagleton and Cunningham, because they both concentrate on language as a *capacity to communicate*. (See Cunningham, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-96; Eagleton, *op. cit.*, Chaps. 1 and 2.) From this point of view language tends to become almost a 'thing' which one possesses, rather than an *activity* in which one engages. Eagleton in particular reveals this in his tendency to write about 'linguistic consciousness', rather than linguistic behaviour, or activity. (I prefer the latter.)

<sup>2</sup>This point is rooted in the work of George Herbert Mead, and in his theory of the significance of the 'generalized other' for our understanding of rule-governed behaviour. First formulated in the 1930s, Mead's approach is today fairly generally accepted in social science. See his *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago University Press, 1934. For a more accessible discussion of his ideas see H. S. Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1968, Part Two, Chap. 5.

<sup>3</sup>In this respect I believe that the connection between language and alienation noted by Eagleton—that it provides man with the means of exploitation—is almost incidental to the present point, and certainly consequent upon it.

being asked to reopen the possibility that there may be universals in our understanding of human nature, and to re-examine their model of man in this light.

### *Destiny and History*

The foregoing analysis also has implications for Christianity. The notion of 'sin' is not an isolated category in Christian thought. As we have already suggested, the notion of 'sin' has its place in the drama of salvation. Man has a *destiny* as well as a *history*. Just as for the Marxist the destiny of man is bound up with the overcoming of alienation in revolution, so for the Christian human destiny is bound up with salvation from sin. But what is the realization of this destiny? Marx was able to envisage a realization of man's destiny in a historical liberation, because he placed historical limits on the postulate of alienation. But if the Christian believes that sin is a universal characteristic of the human condition, then any hope for salvation has to be seen as lying outside of history. But one cannot have a meaningful materialism which builds itself on the possibility of a leap out of history!

A Christian materialism which is worth the name must find its understanding of salvation from sin—the coming of the 'Kingdom'—*within* history. It presupposes that the Kingdom of God is possible among *real* men, here on earth, and in historical time, rather than in some supernatural realm, or out of time. Christianity is challenged, therefore, to review its understanding of its doctrine of salvation and the Kingdom, and to look in particular at the question of the historicity of that Kingdom. (What, for example, did Jesus imply in saying to the Pharisees, 'the Kingdom of God is among you'?)<sup>1</sup>

It is this very question—and the issue of historicity or universalism in general—which has proved the greatest stumbling block to Christian Marxists so far. In spite of the radical and head-turning phrases about 'the socialist republic of heaven', with which the *Slant* 'Manifesto' was sprinkled, a closer examination of the writings of the left theologians reveals a deep ambivalence on this score.<sup>2</sup> In spite of his forthright insistence on the Marxian understanding of man's historical nature<sup>3</sup> ('Men are not *in* time, they are temporal: they are not *in* history, they are historical') Cunningham; in the latter part of his book, appears to solve the problem by putting off the coming of the Kingdom to an indefinite future.

In Christ the denial of the present is total and the norm dynamic, the constant building of the Kingdom. For the Church this means that its role is prophetic and eschatological. In the building of the Kingdom it is always transcendent at every point at which

<sup>1</sup>Luke 17: 20-1.

<sup>2</sup>See *Catholics and the Left*, Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1966, edited by A. Cunningham and T. Eagleton; especially, 'The Church, sacrament of a socialist society', by Martin Redfern.

<sup>3</sup>See Cunningham, *Adam, op. cit.*, p. 153.

we feel a halt might be called. Whenever we can feel satisfied with the present, feel that community has at last been established, the Church must always deny this and go further. . . .

If communism was ever achieved the Church would have to reject this and insist that true community was still to come.<sup>1</sup>

Eagleton, for his part, adopts another solution to the tension: he appears to relinquish altogether a historical realization of the Kingdom. This position is almost forced upon him by the development of his own argument. For if the *differentia specifica* of the human race is the possession of language, and if 'fallenness is the history of the linguistic animal', then necessarily the transcendence of our fallen state can only be achieved at the expense of our linguistic consciousness.<sup>2</sup> In short, a pre-condition for our release from the fall is our ceasing to be human.

The only way in which this condition (i.e. fallenness) could be successfully transformed would be for man's universal modes of communication and relationship to achieve all the sure, close, solid controllability possible to his directly physical action: for the human race to be able to live together, in its linguistically-created global networks, at the same level of unbreakable achievement which two men can establish in sawing down a tree. By their faith in Christ, the eternal word made animal, Christians subscribe to a belief that this absurd vision is the future reality of man: that the opaqueness of our present bodies will be transfigured into pure transparency by the power of God.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that, at this point, Eagleton clasps to himself his Catholicism and takes a leap out of history—but quite obviously at the expense of the firmly historical expectation of revolution which one expects to see as the culmination of his Marxism.

Many people have previously concentrated their efforts, in the development of a viable Christian materialism, on the problem of overcoming the 'dualism' which is possibly implied in the Christian's attempt to talk about a 'spiritual' dimension to life.<sup>4</sup> However, in the opinion of the present writer far greater difficulties lie in the way of such a Christian materialism (particularly if it is to be developed in association with Marxism). These difficulties attach to the Christian view of the nature of man, and in particular to the problems of historicity and universalism discussed above. For at this point at least, the two approaches to man do not appear to lie well together.

The intention of this article has been to open and extend debate, rather than to answer all the questions. In conclusion, however, one thing may definitely be said. If a viable Christian materialism is to develop (and I am confident that this is possible) then it will only do so when Christians come to grips with the problem of man. I hope this short essay has furthered a little this development.

<sup>1</sup>Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Eagleton, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Giles Hibbert, 'Christian Materialism', *New Blackfriars*, May 1969.