

PASTORAL LETTER

About

MARXISM

In my Pastoral Letter today I am going to touch on a very sensitive area. I am quite aware of that. I don't claim that I can give complete answer nor that I will set your minds at rest. Perhaps you will even disagree with me. But I feel that I should share with you my reflections on some concepts which are hotly discussed today. The Church is always challenged by circumstances and situations in the contemporary world.

I dare to speak to you today about the phenomenon of Marxism. Marxism seems to be a great attraction and left its mark on the African continent. Although I do not claim to give an exhaustive picture, which is impossible in a Pastoral Letter, I shall try nevertheless to give some reflections which might help us to understand the rising and the impact of Marxism. In the first part I try to explain some aspects and in the second part I will attempt to present a response.

I. MARXISM

1. Historical Setting

The French Revolution started as a new hope for the people. But soon afterwards the highly praised egalite fraternite and liberte had disappeared under the power of a new monarchy. The relation to property, ownership had shifted again in favour of a new population group.

The last century also saw the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution created the new type of industrial labourers who came flocking into the cities in great numbers. Some considered them as runaways and incapable craftsmen. The new industrial labour force created not only social problems and demanded a new attitude towards those people but it opened as well the question: to whom does the product belong: to the factory owner, or the labourers, or both?

In this period many people gave thought to these manifold problems. Just to mention some Catholics: Dr. Franz-Joseph Buss; Fr. Adolf Kolping; Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler.

2. In our time

In our time we see a growth in sympathy for Marxism. There might be several reasons. One is the failure of development projects to reduce the enormous gap between the "Haves" and "Have nots". Another is the effective absence of substantial economic and political change.

Marxism thrives on frustration and blatant human injustice. There is one sure way for Marxism to grow: doing nothing about the situation. Go on supporting the system as it is, or suggest a few minor, insignificant changes which leave the balance of power basically where it was before and Marxism will spread. Or worse, apply Lenin's axiom: If you want the dictatorship of the proletariat see it that the conditions in the country worsen.

In my opinion, the attraction of Marxism for many Christians is due to the fact that at certain points Marxism and Christianity adopt the same evaluation of the situation, and struggle for the same limited ends. Samuel Escobar observes: "In my opinion the attraction of Marxism can be understood because it offers an analysis of reality that takes into account hard facts that other types of social analysis leave untouched."

If it is true that we live in a period of frustrations, and if Marxism flourishes in this climate, then we as Christians must be alert and have a look at the forceful power of its ideology, which captivates and motivates people to struggle and sacrifice for a new kind of society. Many people fail to appreciate the dynamic of its ideology. For many of the young of our societies there is no other interpretation of reality left which is able to fulfil their need and desire to dream dreams and to see visions.

It is impossible for me, in a Pastoral Letter to go deeply into the philosophical basis of Marxism. I will mention only some major areas so that we may be able to give a Christian response and witness. Perhaps we will be able to understand a little bit of Marx's dialectical view of history.

3. **Its ethical concern**

At one level, Marxism presents a prophetic faith. It presents itself as a defence of man's dignity: of his inalienable right to develop himself fully as a person and to enjoy the fruits of his own labour. Therefore, it styles itself as a crusade against Capitalism as that system of economic organisation, which reduces human beings to mere instruments. It states that the present economic order exploits the people and advances the privileges of a few at the expense of the majority. It also shows why it will be repressive when threatened by the just demands of the masses for equality. Marxism appears to be an ideology, which is born out of a deep compassion for man, and without any vested interest in the existing order to defend.

4. **Its social analysis**

Marx saw the present economic relations of society as the basic cause of inequality and unrest. He developed a lengthy argument to prove that man's basic alienation was political, or social, or religious but economic. Therefore a meaningful and lasting change can only be achieved when the economic base of society is changed.

Marxism claims to have discovered in a scientific way the root problem of man's lack of harmony and fulfilment. It claims to be the solution to the riddle of history.

For Marx the scientific reasoning was not enough. To overcome the present situation he advocated the struggle of the classes. The Proletariat has to fight the Capitalists. At the end there will be the classless society. In the analysis and the experience of our time, class struggle means the liquidation of the privileged group opponents.

5. **The vision of the future**

Marxism possesses a strong element of hope. It claims that change for the better is inevitable, for it is built into the way in which the mode of economic production operates and develops. History, therefore, is on the side of those who accept Marx's basic analysis. Its future is assured. We know where we are going. There will be a new world order when the working class also become the owners of wealth. When that happens, classes will automatically disappear, and also the class conflict.

Fundamental to Marxism is the conviction that the world; need not be as it is today.

6. **Its criticism of religion**

We can understand Marx's near hatred for religion if we look into his life. He was born into a Jewish family and brought up as a Christian. His experience of religion was very unhappy. He was concerned with the structures, values and commitments of the Churches of his day. In his writings he said; that "the beginning of all criticism is the criticism of religion".

We know the famous saying of Marx that religion is "opium of the people"; opium of the poor, by dulling their feeling of suffering, and by offering them a better life beyond the grave.

For the Marxists, society is something, which presupposes itself, determines itself, gives itself norms. Society is dynamic. Society is everything. There is no need for an outside creator or person to ordain the order of society or history.

Atheism is the basic principle of Marxism. It is the Atheism of a system. It rejects the existence of a God as alien to the world, as opium and the alienation of people. "A change has taken place between heaven and earth", as Marx said.

II. A RESPONSE

7. **Marxism and our time**

Marxism, like Capitalism is a product of the last century. They both accepted the fundamental idea that man's chief end is the pursuit of happiness. Happiness is measured in terms of a universal welfare-society and access to an ever-increasing free choice of consumer goods. It does not doubt that man's self-achievement is based on his ability to control natural and economic forces by rational means in order to produce material satisfaction.

Some say that we have to realise that we are living in a post Marxist world.

Capitalism as a way of organising the forces of production has rectified some ills of the time and brought some measure of balance in relation to management, labour force and security. There is a claim in some countries that Marxism has lost its importance. Yet the system is still defective in its failure to distribute wealth equitably and to solve the problem of unemployment. We have to work hard at a system, which provide employment, a dignified salary, and help those who are unable to earn their own living. We have to work for a system which is a compassionate and caring society in which people matter.

Marxism is irrelevant as a solution to the question of development. Marxism assumes always that man's fundamental problem is economic. It is quite unable to show why human beings have not the will to change the system and circumstances in which they live. In the end it is reduced to a deterministic view of the progress of history – change will come – and a romantic view of the future – the change will be good and fair. Experience shows that change in a Marxist country comes about by the dictatorial actions of the party leader.

8. **The failure of the Marxist system**

Marxism has failed in practice. The advent of a classless society is an illusion. Marxist states have produced many new privileged classes with exclusive rights. The promise of the end of exploitation in a socialist society is a religion, it is an Utopian myth. Marxism is the opium of the people, for it encourages an illusory hope in a future free of suffering and toil.

Marxism in practice has failed to produce a motivation, which is sufficient to sustain the momentum of change beyond the first euphoric and ecstatic moments of revolution. Man is not able to sustain feelings of unselfishness for very long. A new class has arisen which not only effectively owns the means of production, but also effectively controls men's destinies as well.

The only criticism, which is allowed is criticism of the enemy out there, namely, Capitalism. No deep thinking criticism of the system is allowed from within for that would be tantamount to admitting that the Marxist interpretation of the play of historical forces would be wrong, could be disproved by history itself.

9. **A Christian response**

Where do we stand as Christians in our time? We cannot opt out of our situation but have to face life's reality. We have to establish the Kingdom of God which Christ proclaimed in his life and teaching, in His death and resurrection. God's Kingdom is a present reality and a future expectation.

Future expectation does not mean that we can leave things as they are nor can we allow that man's selfish desires rule the world. Man's inherent selfishness is only removed when his "old nature is crucified with Christ" (cf. Rm. 6:6), and "God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (cf. Rm. 5:5).

Because the Kingdom of God is a present reality, we Christians have no excuse for believing that substantial change towards a freer and more just society is impossible. On the contrary, we have to work for it with all our abilities.

Our mission in our time is to make disciples who will follow the life-style of the Kingdom as Jesus lived and taught it. Our means are the proclamation of the Word, prayer, life of continued conversion, and acts of loving concern. We have to re-establish God's undisputed sovereignty over all life. The Popes have given us directives in their Social Encyclical Letters and our Bishops in South Africa pronounced their concern in many declarations. The

Kingdom of God is a kingdom of justice, peace, holiness, reconciliation and love. It depends on our action and contribution whether God's Kingdom will be established here on earth.

My dear Brethren, we have tried to learn something and to understand a little bit of the Phenomenon of Marxism, which fascinates so many people today. At all times God remains the Lord. We are always able to do something for Him. Trusting in the assistance of His Grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the intercession of Our Blessed lady, I bless you all in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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