

## DIONYSUS AND THE CRUCIFIED: TOWARDS A LEFT THEOLOGY

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In a religious perspective ... there can be no doubt that indiscriminate suspicion of any idea, without the urge to exalt an idea of one's own, will discourage rather than promote lucidity.

(Ernst Bloch)

### Theology?

The emancipatory intelligence, in thinking its way out of the once dominant economist paradigm, has long recognized the need to expand the Marxist totalization by addressing in depth the theoretical and practical issues posed by such "superstructural" realities as sexuality, nationality, mass psychology, aesthetics and language. But the process of extending the modern Left's comprehension of its project and of the world in which that project is inscribed has been limited by reluctance to explore the problematic character of perhaps the most powerful and encompassing cultural mediation of all: religion.

### *Ecce homo: The Modern Encounter of Marxism and Christianity*

The world-wide movements of radical social renewal in the last decade were accompanied by a ferment of progressive ideas in the religious sphere, particularly within the Christian churches. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the mainstream of left-wing thinking, "old" or "new," was heavily influenced by the secular ecumenicism embraced by the most advanced Christian theologians various factors, including the appearance of radically anthropocentric and anti-capitalist religious currents, softened the hostile stance that the Left had traditionally maintained towards established religion and the ideological topics adumbrated in its theory. Moreover, the rise of modernist "death of God" theologies among both Protestant and Catholic thinkers,<sup>1</sup> and the emergence of an explicitly pro-revolutionary theology of liberation in the Third World, coincided with a resurgent critical humanism among the Marxist and neo-Marxist intellectuals of Western and Eastern Europe to create sufficient common ground for the development of a genuine dialogue.

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Of course, this impetus to converse was strengthened on both sides of the ideological divide by strong conjunctural political interests. The Catholic *aggiornamento* initiated during the pontificate of John XXIII which facilitated the Roman Church's opening to the Left was in part a strategy for institutional survival. The modernization of liturgy, of doctrine and of ecclesiastical organization represented an overdue adaptation to the powerful anti-ritualistic and secularizing tendencies of industrial capitalism; while political realism also dictated Christianity's *rapprochement* with the Communist Parties and regimes of Europe, as well as with liberation movements in the Third World. Correlatively, the regimes of Eastern Europe and the Euro-communist parties of the West were themselves anxious not to be at war with an ideological institution that has well demonstrated its capacity to compete with the organized Left for the hearts and minds of the masses. A reformist Marxist politic thus shared with a left-leaning Christianity a strong interest in paving the way through theological conversation for an end to a century of implacable ideological warfare.

In order to indicate some of the contours of the post-theistic religious humanism on which left-Christianity and a theologically reawakened secular leftism have converged let us look briefly at two recent attempts to explore such a perspective, one from the side of Christian theology, the other from the side of Marxist humanism. We will then be in a position to consider the problems confronting left theology today as a result of the dismal news from the human scientific front that "Man is dead."

### Gardavsky: From Politics to Religion

Gardavsky's *God Is Not Yet Dead*, a product of Christian-Marxist dialogue in Czechoslovakia during the Dubcek period, was first published in English in 1973.<sup>2</sup> Despite the scant attention the book has received in the Anglophone world, it remains important as one of the most comprehensive and cogent attempts by a contemporary Marxist to re-evaluate the relation between Marxism and Christianity and to reflect on the spiritual dimension of a radically left-wing (for Gardavsky, Communist) political commitment.

In tune with the revived neo-Hegelian Marxism of the East European left-liberal intelligentsia, the critical edge of Gardavsky's position is directed against the positivist dead weight of official diamat. Thus his Marxism is conceived as the reflexive moment of emancipatory praxis, rather than as a methodology for the scientific comprehension of history and nature; and from this philosophical standpoint he sets out to correct what he considers to be the one-sidedness of the official Communist orientation in his country towards established religion, arguing in its stead for a more enlightened practice grounded in a reconstructed, spiritually mature materialist atheism. For him,

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the shallowness of the assumptions underlying the Communist *Kulturkampf* against the Churches and the parallel attempt to impose, at least on those holding posts of social and political responsibility, a kind of strict atheist orthodoxy, is revealed by the failure of efforts by State and Party to wipe out religious illusions among the population. He encapsulates the sociological reasons for the health of Christianity in "socialist" Eastern Europe in the lapidary formula: "God is not quite dead ... [because] Man is not quite alive."<sup>3</sup> Prudently setting aside any examination of the forms of social alienation responsible for the persistence of theism in his own society, he simply concludes that under the circumstances it is materialist atheism rather than Christian belief that is currently most in need of popular ideological justification. In this respect, says Gardavsky, the Marxist who wishes to develop an adequate post-Christian perspective has much to learn from the traditions (s)he wishes to surpass.

Hence, the Marxist interest in Christianity is not merely adversarial:

It stems from the inner needs of the Communist movement, which is after all there for all men and women, for an epoch, for the changeover from a makeshift set-up permanently threatened by imminent catastrophe to a reorganized society. The Marxist is convinced that Christianity as a religious movement can be altered to fit in with socialism .... But he knows that for many people who live under socialism and are busy constructing a socialist system, or are still at the stage of fighting for one, belief in God still cannot be altered. He knows that socialism is merely a transitional stage. He also knows that God is not yet dead. So what is God? Where are the blind spots in socialism? ... where in terms of our convictions are the chasms which are even more unfathomable than those of Christianity? What human incentives can act more effectively on behalf of mankind — by means of their truthfulness and range — than belief in God?<sup>4</sup>

In attempting to establish the content of these "human incentives" Gardavsky employs two somewhat different procedures.

The first part of *God Is Not Yet Dead*, entitled "Monuments," is concerned with a recuperative demonstration of the positive symbolic value to the religious atheist of the Western Biblical tradition and of the most important Christian theological systems rooted in it. For Gardavsky, this strategy of critical appropriation has practical as well as intrinsic religious merit: only by rediscovering and acknowledging its historical rootedness in the authentic

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cultural traditions of Western civilisation can contemporary Marxism hope to end its ghettoisation as an alien ideological element. Moreover, a magnanimous ecumenicism towards existing intellectual traditions is the very essence of cultural progressiveness and is thus imperative for a Marxist. "The radical aspect of socialism," he argues, "seems to be something more than just a short circuit of revolutionary traditions. It is rather its faculty for converting into nutrients all the various components of the soil of history."<sup>5</sup>

However, if the Judaeo-Christian tradition is to be assimilated by the Left in this way, it must first be reinterpreted so that its human content can be extracted from the illusory and theistic medium in which it is embedded; and, more positively, "it must be *integrated* to comply with the very essence of socialism, with its inherent laws and its spiritual equipment."<sup>6</sup> The interpretative method Gardavsky follows is a version of the anthropological hermeneutic established by Feuerbach and further developed by Bloch — with the modification that Gardavsky focusses less on the historical development of the concept of the Absolute in Biblical religion than on the life-orientations implied in the life and thought of the monumental religious figures he singles out as crucial. Thus, Jacob is depicted as the prototype of the human subject who breaks with "natural" ascription to choose an identity and an active project: Man as the creature who makes his own history. And Jesus, demythologised, is read as the embodiment of human love which itself constitutes both the miraculous means and utopian aim that give power and substance to Man's capacity for self-direction.

Apotheosizing humanity — rather than projecting divinity heavenward — has of course been a common strategy in all major attempts to produce a post-theistic version of the Western religious tradition. Gardavsky's specific contribution to the thematization of this project is to insist on a distinction between the Biblical love of Man, which he calls *hominism*, and Classical (first Greek, then Renaissance) *humanism*. According to Gardavsky, what limited the latter was that Classical philosophies of Man always set the activity and experience of the species within a fixed and statically ordered cosmos.

The world is seen as a place in which men can find their way about relatively easily and can develop their *techne*, or skills, using them to gain mastery over the forces of nature and over objects. Man finds his way outwards from within. He has no idea what it means to take history into account in his deliberations. He just watches time passing, noticing the way it acts in cycles; but he is not keyed to the future, and looks back at the past instead, seeing it always in static terms as a "golden age." This spiritual ambience gave rise to the rational analysis of science, to the "scientific"

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attitude which thinks in terms of objects, and to an interest in technology as a means of gaining mastery over the world.

In contrast, for the hominist,

Man is a creature who evolves by fighting and by answering the call of the present with a free decision. If he manages to love in a radical manner, he breaks open the womb of the future by his own action, and thus surpasses his potential. This is his whole secret, that is what makes him a miracle in himself....<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between humanism and hominism is axial for Gardavsky's critical examination of Christian theology (whose milestones for him are Augustine, Aquinas and Pascal), as well as for his overall attempt to specify the requirements of a leftist religiosity critically based on the best elements in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Christian theology — on its good side — is seen as a cumulative attempt to synthesize Judaeo-Christian hominism with the rationalist cosmology Europe inherited from the Ancient Mediterranean world. For Gardavsky, in Pascal's radically subjective version of Christianity — faith in Jesus and the salvifics of the Cross as the only rational response to Man's solitude and insignificance in an impersonal and infinite cosmos — the Christian attempt to synthesize its hominism with Classical rationalism was brought to the brink of a solution: a solution which Pascal was historically incapable of formulating both because of his undialectical conception of nature and because of the contemplative asocial conception he had of Man. "Pascal's problem is how to preserve and develop humanity in the cosmos; that is his formula for solving the problem of subjective identity .... According to Pascal, the answer did not lie in talking about action, but in talking about Jesus. That is his tragedy."<sup>8</sup>

In these terms, Gardavsky sees the progressive forces of modern theology as having registered a decisive advance over Pascal — both in their commitment to come to terms with a scientifically based philosophy of nature, and in their movement towards an interpretation of the Christian *arcantum* as a love-based vision of the possibility of healing human misery through the earthly coming of the Kingdom. Such trends evidently point towards the kind of reformed Christianity Gardavsky sees as compatible with the deepest ideological needs of those engaged in anti-capitalist praxis and post-capitalist social construction. Their project of demystifying Christianity from within needs to be taken further, however, if the new theology is to serve in the formation of a mature socialist religious sensibility. Thus he argues that the neo-Thomist integralism of Maritain must be purged of its false identification of capitalism with modernity; and that, as it stands, Rahner's "anonymous Christianity"

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atomises Christianity's explosive social message by insisting that in so far as single individuals are struggling with the commitment to become fully human, the Kingdom Jesus promised is already here.

In the concluding section of the book, Gardavsky switches to a direct treatment of the theological position for which he wishes to argue: Marxist atheism. Not wishing to employ directly religious terminology, Gardavsky characterises the level of discourse at which the fundamental principles of Marxist atheism can be explicated as "metaphysics." Indeed, he is at pains to emphasize that the unity of theory and practice constitutive of a Marxist orientation makes the deepest dimension of Marxism's ideological self-consciousness quite unlike the credalism at the theoretical centre of traditional religion: in form this "metaphysics represents the reflective dimension of practical behaviour" rather than the faith-derived theorems of a doctrine. Thus the subject-matter of this metaphysics is the identity and life-orientation of a species-being whose praxis is generically activist, history-making, and in this sense self-transcending. For Gardavsky, a religious perspective developed in such terms would necessarily go beyond the science/religion and subject/object antinomies that until now have confusedly expressed the unresolved contradictions of Western culture's fractured ideological foundation. "Atheism as Marxist metaphysics represents an attempt to formulate a theory of subjective identity which would not be subjectivist, a theory of transcendence, of overstepping one's limit which would not be objective."<sup>9</sup>

Marxist atheism, then, is to be theologically constructed, or recovered, by developing "metaphysical" reflections on the interior dimension of praxis. The praxis Gardavsky takes as his starting point is not any kind of practical activity, but the critico-revolutionary praxis of those engaged in collective self-transformation — the praxis of historical *actors* in the best sense. Only that type of praxis is specifically and fully human:

... to be a Marxist atheist involves nothing less than being an active member of that community which has drawn from the historical position held by the working-class certain conclusions concerning the tangible prospects which await man .... This type of community must logically look at all problems in a radical and humane light, reject all forms of intervention from illusionary or religious thinking, and apply the same radical methods in solving the problems. If we consider the full extent of a free decision of this type, we will eventually come up with an attempt to formulate something which has always ... been known in philosophy as metaphysics.<sup>10</sup>

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However — and this is Gardavsky's practical justification for the development of an explicit Marxist metaphysics — sustained commitment to radical politics is always subjectively problematic, despite the fact that through it Man expresses his natural and authentic identity as a self-determining being, because the future towards which human action is directed is always essentially open: not only "in the sense of offering every possible opportunity to Man, but also in the sense that it remains uncertain whether it can ever come to anything, indeed whether it will ever happen."<sup>11</sup> Since action carries with it no guarantees of success for the collective subject, let alone for the individual whose death prevents the full realization of his/her life-activity, an orientation towards radical praxis implies a state of commitment that goes beyond self-interest in the ordinary sense. Critico-revolutionary praxis may be anthropologically "natural" but it is not motivationally spontaneous.

Gardavsky, in search of a non-authoritarian and non-artificial way to close the ideological circle, rejects as repressive and existentially inadequate the Communist Party's conventional recourse to "moralizing appeals," as well as "any sort of Messianic thinking" or the "belief that Communism is mankind's port of call among the islands of paradise." The solution, rather, lies in the actual development of a radical subjectivity that is existentially authentic to the individual human condition and directed out into the world as a progressive politic. Moreover, this subjectivity does not need to be invented, for it already exists "in the innermost motives of the movement which is aware of the provisional nature of our world ... and is continually struggling against it."<sup>12</sup>

Within Gardavsky's social existentialist framework, an authentic, illusion-free human identity can only arise in principle through the recognition and resolution of the dilemma presented by two central facts of individual existence: death, which cuts us off from our projects, and involvement in social life, which gives them meaning. The tragic dimension of the former and the self-transcending aspect of the latter are irreducible. How, then, can the seemingly contradictory attitudes implied by an appreciation of these realities cohere in a single sensibility? And further, how can this happen in a way that motivates good will and good faith expressed outwardly in radical politics? Gardavsky's answer, startling only when set against the moralism and scientific objectivism which have tended to predominate within the organised Left, is "the human and inter-human relationship which has always traditionally borne the name of 'love.'" Love for others validates the social world into which we pour out our creative activity, and love for one another provides in the face of the certainty of death, not only solace and solidarity among fellow sufferers, but moral and psychological support as well for the collective life that is the essential medium for the only form of self-transcendence and immortality we are granted. Gardavsky's "love" is thus not conceived as an attitude externally introduced, Marxist metaphysics' *deus ex machina*, but as "the existential

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precondition of all human relationships ... an 'eternal' theme because it is the principle underlying creation, Man's practical activity in history *par excellence*. As such, it represents the transition from the 'I' to the 'we' and vice versa."<sup>13</sup> So, in the end, what Gardavsky, the committed atheist, conceives to be central to the formation of a Marxist metaphysics is reflection on the anthropological significance of Christianity's highest value — love; not in the sentimentalized sense it now has in popular culture, but as a difficult, death-laden burden which, once consciously assumed, has the magical capacity to "suspend the causality of nature by giving it a human stamp," and which automatically bears with it the hope for the coming Kingdom, "a community offering a life worthy of man."<sup>14</sup>

It is unfortunate that Gardavsky declines to elaborate on the full logic of the love-theology sketched out at the end of his book, since as it stands the position is only theoretically asserted. This is perhaps permissible considering that the emphasis of his argument is polemical and programmatic, an intervention intending mainly to stress the need for reflection on the actual and ideal condition of left-wing subjectivity in the crushing spiritual context of prevailing Marxist orthodoxy. For a fuller treatment of the solidarist metaphysic he discerns as the religious basis of radical praxis one must perhaps turn to the work of theologians who have less of a bad conscience about the nature of their trade — *i.e.*, the professional theologians of the Christian Church.

### Baum: From Religion to Politics

Gregory Baum, one of the best known and most influential modernists within North American Catholicism, well exemplifies the contribution to a convergent left theology that can be made by contemporary Christianity. His recent work, *Religion and Sociology*,<sup>15</sup> not only expresses, in the language of that faith, a reflexive radical theology very similar to the "Marxist metaphysics" advocated and outlined by Gardavsky, it also adds important and for a Christian, even startling, dimensions to the argument.

The book's central aim, indicated in its subtitle, "*A Theological Reading of Sociology*," is to clarify and deepen Christian theology by appropriating to it the rational kernel of Western sociology's insights into the nature of Man and the character of good and evil. Presumably Christian theologians, however left-wing, are less allergic to the cognitive claims of classical "bourgeois" social theory than Marxists, however committed to self-demystification. While a vulgar historical materialist may see in this only a demonstration of the affinity of one idealism for another, Baum's plea to co-religionists for a sociological correction of Christian theology could be addressed with equal validity to those who, like Gardavsky, seek to elucidate the mysteries of Marxism.

Like Gardavsky's book, *Religion and Sociology* begins with an ecumenicist



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reading of a rival ideological complex — here, classical social theory from Hegel to Freud — and then follows with a direct account of the positive ideological reconstruction towards which this reading implicitly argues. What Baum advances is “critical theology,” the reflexive intelligence of a radical Catholicism in the immanentist tradition of Maurice Blondel and closely related to modern German “political theory” and the “theology of liberation” that flourishes in Latin America.

In his theological foray into the secular sociological tradition, Baum seizes on three essential points. First, he discovers in all the major figures he examines — Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Tocqueville, Toennies, Weber, Durkheim and Freud — a common passionate commitment to humanist principles, actualized in social critique and the urge to reform. Amidst the bewildering diversity of categories, methodologies and perspectives, which he makes no attempt to synthesize or treat as a whole, he detects, as a connecting thread, a many-sided and to a degree cumulative attempt to analyze the interplay of humanizing and dehumanizing forces in the industrial social order that was emerging in nineteenth— and early twentieth-century Europe — an intellectual project that cannot but be of theological interest to a religion in tension with the evils of the world. Taking as his base line the notion of alienation (from nature, collective life and individual human being) developed by Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx, Baum proceeds to examine the sociological insights offered by subsequent thinkers into the dark side of emergent industrial capitalism. In Marx’s economic critique, Toennies romantically tinged contrast of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim’s diagnosis of anomie and moral crisis, and Weber’s doleful analysis of the triumph of bureaucracy and instrumental rationality, Baum sees so many angles from which critical light can be thrown on the prevailing forms of “social sin” in the modern world; and, corresponding to them, forms of transformative practice that run with the grain of history and point actively towards the redemptive human future foreshadowed by Jesus’ enunciation of God’s coming Kingdom of Heaven. While Baum makes no systematic theoretical attempt to compare or reconcile the different schools’ competing cognitive claims, he makes clear his own commitment to a form of Marxism modified, in its determinism, by an open action theory, and, in its one-sided emphasis on economic structures and determinations, enriched by the insights of Durkheim, Weber and Freud into the human and social significance of symbol, ritual and subjectivity. In the case of Third World societies imperialized by Western capital, Marxism (in its most elementary form) provides an adequate account of prevailing social evils; but, for Baum, a much more sophisticated sociological framework is needed to comprehend the multiple oppression and alienation that characterizes the more complex societies of the industrial West and to reflect with clarity on the correspondingly multi-dimensional strategy required by a socially redemptive praxis. The

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political as opposed to moral and theological logic of such a strategy is glossed over in the book, which seeks only to emphasize the theological point — that the reformist and revolutionary roads to social redemption in North America comprise authentic avenues for practical Christian witness.

The second set of insights that Baum draws from classical sociology concerns the character of religion itself as a social phenomenon causally and functionally related to others, and in particular the profound ambiguity that by virtue of its contradictory social insertion seems always to have marked religion's historical role. Religion has, on the one hand, provided legitimating symbols for established and regressive modes of social domination, and, on the other, supplied utopian motivations for rebellions and movements of cultural renewal that push the human species forward towards greater social freedom and an enlarged capacity for individual and collective self-realization. This paradox Baum relates to Hegel's theological distinction between "bad religion," with its self-alienated worship of an external Absolute, and "good religion" which comprehends the genuine Absolute as the revealed immanent infinity that constitutes the spiritual ground of our being.

In depicting religion as the mystified product of a consciousness inverted by alienated life-conditions which serves the ideological interests of the world's real rulers, Marx — in Baum's view — captured the sociological essence of "bad religion," but was too much in the grip of 1840's radical secularism to develop a theoretical or ideological appreciation of religion's progressive moment. For Baum, as indeed for Hughes whose line of interpretation (in *Consciousness and Society*)<sup>16</sup> Baum generally follows, it is precisely here that the turn-of-the-century thinkers, especially Durkheim and Weber, registered an important intellectual advance — both over Marx and over the whole tendency of nineteenth-century positivism to depreciate subjectivity and its cultural expressions. In Weber, Baum reads that religions are subject to an internal dialectic of institutionalization/deinstitutionalization embodied in the contrasting religious modalities of priests and prophets, and that this process intersects with the developing concatenation of contradictory economic and political interests to produce, depending on the circumstances, general ideological stability, legitimation for dominant or dominated strata, or (on occasion) an explosive fusion of value change and social struggle in which the social constellation is decisively altered. Durkheim, despite his atheism, is likewise depicted as holding to a dialectically balanced view of religion's socio-historical role — providing an institutionalized framework of collective beliefs which functions both to integrate and reproduce existing social structures and to orient sociated individuals towards absolute moral ideals which, though limited in their range by the social conditions and structures they reflect, nevertheless always transcend society's contemporary imperfections and point the praxis of the ideally committed along the vector of social improvement.

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In Durkheim's and Weber's dialectical appreciation of the creative and regressive social moments represented in the ebb and flow of religious history, and in their further blurring of the line between religion and the symbolic universe in general, Baum finds a sociological anchor for his own ecumenicism and commitment to the cause of Catholic renewal. He also sees in the general application of sociological reason to the analysis of religion a model for the reconceptualization of theology as a mode of theoretical practice.

Rejecting the scholastic (to use the current jargon, theoreticist) conception of theology as the systematics of dogma, Baum defines it as an essentially social activity: "the reflection of Christians, in conversation with the entire believing community, on the world in which they belong and the religious tradition in which they participate."<sup>17</sup> Understood as religion's critical self-consciousness, theology's task is to help believers understand better the nature and consequences of their own collective religious praxis in the context of a Church, that for Baum, always stands in need of reform. Only with the rise of sociological thinking, however, does it become possible for theology to grasp in a fully demystified way the character of the actual task on which it was engaged, or to conduct its critical reflections on religious beliefs and activities with a clear-headed understanding of the social and unconscious nature of the sin that rules the world, even inside the Church, and blocks redemption.

Learning from the social sciences and the various critiques of religion, Christian theologians are able to discern the ideological and pathogenic trends in their own religious tradition and then, by opting for a wider meaning of the promised salvation, interpret the Christian gospel as a message of deliverance and reconciliation. The sustained dialogue with the critical thought of the late Enlightenment I wish to call "critical theology." This critical theology may lead theologians to discover elements of false consciousness in their perception of reality and thus produce a significant change of mind and heart.<sup>18</sup>

In effect, a sociologically enlightened "critical" theology is charged by Baum with two substantive tasks: first, the systematic reinterpretation of the symbols at the living centre of faith as utopian vectors for social praxis; and, second, the critical evaluation of current religious belief and practice in terms of their positive or negative contribution to the Kingdom's earthly realisation. As Baum puts it, "It is the task of critical theology to discern the structural consequences of religious practice, to evaluate them in the light of the church's normative teaching, and to enable the church to restructure its concrete social presence so that its social consequences approach more closely its profession of

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faith.”<sup>19</sup> Baum’s own analysis of the sense in which Christianity’s traditionally undialectical self-conception was partially responsible for the evils of anti-Semitism is an excellent illustration of the kind of theological practice his book recommends. The current priority for critical theology in this respect, one must suppose, is a deconstruction of Christianity’s even more deeply entrenched patriarchalism.<sup>20</sup>

One notes that with Baum’s appropriation of classical sociology’s humanist social critique, dialectical analysis of religion, and historically reflexive mode of self-understanding, theology passes over into a form of thought that almost exactly mirrors in method and content the secular neo-Hegelian Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School: teleologically directed reflection on transformative praxis. Moreover, his sociologisation of theology simultaneously delivers a radically politicised conception of religion. Given his Christian commitment, however, this politicisation does not lead to a liquidation of theological reflection, as tends to be the case in the morally driven milieu of secular activism, but rather to a work of politically directed reinterpretation in which the symbolic truths of the Christian story are translated into terms relevant and credible to the contemporary intelligence.

The route, *via* socio-historical reflection, from theological to socio-political radicalism has been well explored before Baum, of course, and he is particularly open in expressing his debt to the thought of Blondel and Bloch. The first and fundamental step is hermeneutic: to reinterpret the ultimate symbolic objects of traditional belief and worship by investing them explicitly with their implicit human social content. Thus, the image of God “out there” — Hegel’s “bad infinity” — is replaced by an immanentist conception of a divinity that is within and among us, active in our individual and collective history, the force that impels humanity to realise its elusive and evolving Ideal: in Baum’s words, “history’s forward principle.” Correspondingly, the figure of Jesus is to be regarded as no more nor less than the historical embodiment — purified, acted out, made symbolically available as a life and death for others — of that restless Absolute that operates through and despite us. The message enunciated through his activity and words is that faith in and obedience to the divine principle within us will bring Heaven within our earthly grasp. The Pauline and priestly forms of Christianity are emphatically rejected here in favour of the prophetic and millenarian; and once divine intervention into history is seen as an intervention from within, *i.e.*, through human agency, we are firmly on the terrain of a revolutionary social doctrine, albeit one that is ideologically reinforced by appeal to a highly condensed and socially entrenched mystical symbology. To use Niebuhr’s terminology, Baum’s Christ — as Love militant and incarnate — is Christ the Transformer of culture.<sup>21</sup>

The effect of Baum’s sociologically inflected immanentisation is not merely, of course, to situate the meaning of Christian symbols fully within the context

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of this-sided human life and experience, but to insist simultaneously on their social dimension. Heaven and hell, sin and redemption, are to be comprehended in terms of the historical drama of humanity's struggle against the alienated life conditions blindly produced in the course of social development. The redemptive task of the Church — understood very broadly as the community of those who believe in the infinite love within that moves us towards our authentic human destiny — is to struggle against all forms of self-alienation. This entails a political struggle in fusion with the oppressed and alienated against the structural conditions that are responsible for their dehumanisation. Indeed, the Church — considered in this way as a counter-community in radical opposition to an alienated world — seems to be identical with what more secular thinkers might, in an ideal and qualified sense, call the Left: humanity's conscious political and cultural vanguard.

The critical thrust of Baum's position is to effect a radical deprivatisation of Christianity's traditional ethical and spiritual framework. Salvation and damnation are to be understood as states of social being produced in and by human history, and not merely questions of individual destiny. In this light, the responsibility for persistent human evils should be attributed at least as much to ideological blindness and mystification in the face of impersonal social processes as from the individual human propensity to sin. For Baum, as for Bloch, privatized religion which distracts individual attention from social evil and even sanctions it as the inevitable product of an ineradicable defect in the species, is not merely conservative but satanic: the evil dimension of organized religion which the critical conscience theology exists to comprehend and transform. Thus, from the human-social perspective Baum claims to find that, at the heart of the revealed world of God, even the problematic of death/salvation/immortality is critically dissolved as a false solution to an ideologically — because individualistically — posed problem.

The Christian teaching of eternal life ... rather than making the believers focus on their own death and worry about what happens to them after they die, liberates them for a greater love and makes them yearn for the reconciliation and deliverance of all peoples. The Christian message of resurrection, understood in this deprivatising perspective, far from making Christians concentrate on their own heaven, frees them from anxiety about their own existence and directs their hope to the new creation.<sup>22</sup>

For Baum as for Gardavsky the modern existentialist concern for the subjective problem presented by individual mortality merely symptomises a state of chronic social atomisation, in which death's natural salve, the individual's im-

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aginative connection with the future of the human community, is pathologically weakened by the alienated condition of the community and of the individual's relation to it. In so far as death is a socially produced problem, the solution to it is also social — in the creation of a loving community where our projects and lives can leave creative traces that outlast us.

Of course, while Baum construes faith in the possibility of such a loving community as tantamount to belief in God, for Gardavsky such a death-transcending faith is the purest expression of an atheist commitment pushed to its logical extreme. So Baum's proposal to demythologise Christian theology does not make it completely interchangeable with the purely atheistic utopianism advanced by neo-Marxists like Bloch and Gardavsky. He refrains from making God disappear altogether, and, while sympathetic to Bloch's construction of a materialist metaphysics (of "not-yet-being"), dismisses the anthropological formulations it engenders as wilful periphrasis: a "refusal to speak the holy name." Critical theology, he insists, "is not the submission of dogma to an anthropological norm as if the human were the measure of the divine: critical theology is rather the submission of the structural consequences of dogma to the revealed norm of the gospel."<sup>23</sup>

However, one is certainly tempted to think that for left theology the problem of "God" has become merely semantic, and that the living issues lie elsewhere.

### Some Unresolved Issues of Organization and Faith

Despite the different ideological languages they employ, Baum and Gardavsky are plainly concerned with the same question: how to elucidate and ground the faith that underlies commitment to transformist politics. In both cases, despite weak attempts to provide it with a materialist foundation by invoking an anthropology of self-transcendence-through-society, that faith is conceived to have an existentially irreducible character as faith. In this alienated dispensation, a leap of love and imagination is required before any commitment to the human future of Man can even be conceived. Left theology, arising in the area of overlap between a politicised Christianity, and a religiously sensitive secular Leftism, is simply the attempt to make the fideistic interiority of such a utopian political commitment absolutely explicit, and to comprehend it in as demythologised and thus as socio-historically reflexive a manner as possible.

Of course, for more than a decade the rationality of any metaphysics constructed out of faith in Man-becoming has been severely challenged by the rise of explicitly anti-humanist theoretical trends within the social sciences, and most of all by the irruption into Left theoretical circles of modern French structuralism. The problem of how to rationalise its utopian anthropologism is now, in fact, the central issue facing Left theology. But before turning, finally, to a

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brief discussion of the religious implications of structuralism's theoretical anti-humanism, it is worth drawing out from the contrasting versions of Left theology presented by Baum and Gardavsky, some issues internal to their basic line of argument that the further development of Left theology will also have to clarify and resolve.

First, there are a number of issues surrounding what we might call the "organizational question." These concern the composition, constitution and historical role of what Baum calls the Church, and Gardavsky the Communist Party — a difference that itself signals a difficulty.

Given that those who hold the kind of transformist faith in Man Baum and Gardavsky expound are *ipso facto* committed to a radical political praxis, believers are organizers and presumably linked together in a coordinated collectivity. But how is that coordination to be achieved and how are the boundaries of membership to be drawn? Above all, is one to think of such a collectivity as primarily a community of *believers*, *i.e.*, as a Church, or as a *political* movement, *i.e.*, as a party? Both Baum and Gardavsky are insistent on the need to conceive of a vanguard community of believer/activists whose organized articulation is broader than that suggested by the terms "Church" or "Party" — and indeed cuts across the distinction. Thus Gardavsky describes the collective utopian subject as "a community that has drawn from the historical position held by the working class certain conclusions concerning the tangible prospects which await man .... [It] logically look[s] at all problems in a radical and humane light."<sup>24</sup> This is to invoke the image of a Left that not only transcends its internal (let us say denominational) divisions, but which is also broader in scope than any purely political association. Baum, from the side of Christian ecclesiology, similarly advances the conception of an "open Church." While as a Catholic he continues to believe that the Church of Rome has a special historical mission, its adherents are by no means coextensive with "the entire community of believers," in as much as God's word has been historically revealed to Man in many symbolic forms.

However, if we accept the general principle that the progressive vanguard ought to operate communally and collectively, the actuality of fragmentation both within and between the organized "religious" and "political" traditions that ideologically sustain it suggests that there is a need for extensive reorganization and institutional regroupment. To this end, it is of course helpful for Marxists and Christians to promote a general ecumenicism of viewpoint, but this is practically insufficient. What also needs to be considered is the kind of relationship desirable between the organizations and ideological traditions of utopian religion and transformist politics. Should they remain separate or be combined? It may be readily admitted, perhaps, that radical politics, to be effective, has to have some measure of coordination — but must the faith that sustains that political activity also crystallize in an institutional expression? And

if so, what role if any is there for an *independent* ideological organization or association in the articulation and dissemination of radical belief? Both Baum and Gardavsky are committed to the radical reform of the existing Christian Church — but neither of them sees as problematic the relationship of such a reformed Church with the organized political milieu, whether from the point of view of their respective historical functions or from the point of view of the boundaries and modalities of cadre membership.

These questions are particularly difficult to formulate from the point of view of secular leftism, conceptually blind as it has been not only to the mediated process in which consciousness — including its own — arises in the first place, but also to the social mechanisms through which consciousness is *reproduced*. Concerning the dissemination of revolutionary consciousness among the masses, organized leftism knows only how to permute the spontaneist notion of trusting to the magic of radicalisation through struggle with the vanguardist notion of introducing universalist ideas and strategic demands didactically to the most militant sectors of the revolutionary class through what Leninism calls “agitation and propaganda.” And as for the reproduction of its own consciousness in the subjectivity of its members, despite all the evident solidarity rituals and mechanisms of reward and punishment that ensure each organisation’s ideological reproduction, the organised Left milieu tends to be too inhibited by its hyper-rationalistic and anti-ritualist prejudices to recognise these reproductive processes for what they are, still less to assimilate the “bourgeois” concepts necessary to comprehend and rationally strategise them. An ideological tradition that puts politics in command of everything, that refuses to recognise the irreducibility in an alienated social world of utopian faith as precisely *faith*, and which lacks even a rational theory of the social functioning of the demonstrations it likes to hold, cannot be expected to think easily about the ecclesiastical element that actually or ideally operates within the radical social milieu it politically encadres. And yet the Left, as an organised system of collective beliefs and practices related to the sacred-for-it, is (in the Durkheimian sense) a real church. Left theology needs an ecclesiology attuned to this reality, as embarrassing as it might be, if the relation between organised religion and organised politics is to be posed as something more than a tactical and diplomatic problem. The fundamental issue here at the pragmatic level is how, in the light of the most advanced sociological understanding available to us, can the utopian faith that enables transformist politics to transcend the political and cultural limits of *ressentiment* be most successfully sustained? How, in other words, can the community of (radical) believers reproduce itself as, precisely, a community of believers? Baum, as a Catholic sympathetic to “bourgeois” sociology has less trouble than Gardavsky in facing the question. For him, Catholic symbols and sacraments, like the visible organised Church they institutionally constitute, are essential for the historical preservation of the faith they incarnate. But he does



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not argue for the total Christianization of the Left, so we are led to assume that in his projected ideological reform these would remain intact. Gardavsky, writing as a Czech Communist and restrained by self-censorship as well as by "Marxist" sociological insensitivity, ignores the ecclesiological question altogether.

But faith to be organised must first be symbolised. Indeed, the question of the organic relation between the Left as an ideological institution and the Church, ultimately turns on the question of whose symbolic language ought to predominate — that of the atheist Left with its materialist philosophy and esoteric tradition of events, heroes, founders and sages, or that of traditional religion. Again, neither Baum nor Gardavsky directly addresses the issue, although the preferences of each are clear. Gardavsky recognises the need to synthesise the anthropologically utopian cosmology of the Left with the resonant deep symbols of Western culture; but beyond presenting a Biblical hermeneutic he does not discuss the problem of how best to transform left-wing symbology. Baum is obviously committed to the symbolic language of Christianity — which he interprets as a divine revelation in constant need of re-interpretation. He does not doubt that these symbols can continue to function effectively as the historically privileged expression of faith in the love and self-transcending capacity of humanity — even though he sets before critical theology the necessary and as yet unaccomplished task of dymythologising Christianity so that its symbols can be read successfully in these terms. The practical adequacy of Baum's solution to the symbolic question, a radically re-interpreted Christianity, is however open to serious question. The secularising trend that has killed the idea of God "out-there" has also surely discredited the symbolic forms in which this idea has been historically expressed. If God is just another name for the self-transcendent aspect of the species and if Jesus is regarded as Incarnate only in the sense that in him this idea was first and most explosively expressed, then why employ theistic terminology with its trail of super-natural associations at all? Besides, if the objective is to imbue the progressive community's symbolic activity with a *mythos* that signifies the maximum consciousness historically possible, it is (from an ecumenicist perspective) implausible to suppose that any single world religion, however successfully its real human message is extracted from the depths of its mythology, is broad enough for the purpose. Here, Gardavsky turns out to be as narrowly ethnocentric as Baum. For in the symbolic constitution of modern transformist sensibility, the element of revolutionary humanist faith that he and Baum have extrapolated from the Judaeo-Christian tradition needs to be complemented not only by Appollonian rationalism (which they recognise) but also by revolutionary energy — which is pagan, erotic and, above all, Dionysian. As a symbolic resource for revolutionary inspiration, the prophetic millenianism that expresses itself in the person and activity of Jesus is certainly valuable and

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even culturally indispensable. But its eros is ultimately too pale, its ethos too tragic and its utopian imagination too limited by a penchant for the meek and the tranquil to encompass all the dimensions of a contemporary transformist sensibility. Radical religion, in short, wants to worship Dionysis *and* the Crucified — and (why not?) the laughing Buddha too. It need hardly be said that on the theoretical plane, also, Left theology will have to move beyond exclusively Judaeo-Christian ethical and philosophical categories if it is to comprehend the logic of a consciousness in which such apparently contradictory commitments can subjectively and rationally cohere.

Moreover, reflection on the symbolic requirements of a more expanded form of radical sensibility than that articulated in the ecumenical speculations of Baum and Gardavsky points also to the need for a critical theological examination of the "profane" ritual and symbolism manifest at the less explicitly religious levels of contemporary culture. For example, it was in the world of audiovisual entertainment that radical youth culture in the sixties celebrated the Messianism and energy-worship that unified and powered it as a movement. Rock culture — as one of its many functions — set to music the rebellion of a frustrated sexuality against the repressive remains of Judaeo-Christian moralism, and choreographed its spectacular, if short-lived, encounter with that tradition's utopian and apocalyptic moment. On the organizational level, the fact that a sector of the capitalist entertainment industry can play a vital role in the ritual and symbolic life of the transformist milieu suggests that Left theology not only needs to broaden its ideological framework, but needs also to adopt a radically pluralist ecclesiology.

### Radical Humanism Under Attack: Is Man Dead?

Left theology, however, has not been in any position to extend its reflection on the religious dimension of transformist praxis to a consideration of these internal issues. The convergence of Christian utopian immanentism and neo-Marxist religious atheism had barely crystallised when the Messianic mood of global movement politics that sustained its optimism and spirit of dialogue dissipated in the reactionary wasteland of the seventies. Moreover, the rise of explicitly and militantly anti-humanist trends within the most theoretically advanced circles of the contemporary human sciences, and their almost triumphant resonance within the intellectual Left, has put Left theology's anthropological *fides quaerens intellectum* thoroughly on the theoretical defensive. Before the theory of radical religious praxis can be advanced any further, therefore, its humanist faith must be secured or reinterpreted in the face of the structuralist challenge.

There is an irony in the current ideological situation. Radical humanism — *i.e.*, the belief that Man to become himself must become free, and that the

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condition for desiring freedom is emancipation from illusion — was originally an atheist philosophy directed against Christianity. Dialogue between these traditional ideological antagonists only became possible when, in the twilight of Stalinism, Marxist humanists were moved to reassert the visionary dimension of a leftist commitment and a socially troubled Christianity was able to recognize in the mirror of the Left's religious atheism a secularized version of itself. Now, with French structuralism's campaign to discredit social ontologies that rest on the category of the human subject and specifically with the Althusserian exorcism of the "ghost of Hegel," we have come full circle: after Vatican II and Uppsala it is Christianity which waves the radical humanist banner and the atheist Left, with its "theoretical anti-humanism" which attacks it. It is a further irony that Althusser, the leading left-wing intellectual figure in the resurgence of structuralism, was himself (at least in the period before his Maoist self-criticism)<sup>25</sup> a crypto-Comteian with an implicit Left theology of his own.

Although it carries an ideological charge, the modern French structuralist critique of humanism is primarily addressed to problems of theoretical practice: like fire in the development of physics,<sup>26</sup> Man in the human sciences is declared to be a pseudo-reality, a conceptual obstacle to rather than the possible object of scientific knowledge. Thus, social reality is to be comprehended as a structure of structures, and "praxis" is dissolved into an asymmetrical totality of decentred practices. Above all, war is declared on the "myth of the subject," and human history is to be read as a succession of structural events without an underlying logic or *telos*.

Left theology's response to this challenge has been easier to formulate from the Christian than from the Marxist-atheist side, because for the former, faith in what has been divinely revealed is irreducible and prior to human scientific knowledge, whereas for the latter (particularly in its dominant Hegelian form) the truth of the radical perspective depends entirely on its concordance with a correct grasp of the circumstances that produce it and the forward motion in history it seeks to express. Of course, the Christian theologian is always free, within the framework of his/her religious commitment, to modify the Christian interpretation of Revelatory symbols in the light of new understandings about nature and history — and indeed for the privatised, other-worldly Christianity Baum singles out for attack, the structuralist critique of humanist, praxis-centred reality-paradigms presents no threat at all. Even for modernists who conceive the Church to be socially committed and politically active, charged with the mission of realising God's Kingdom on earth, a retreat into (utopian) fideism is still possible, since natural philosophy, unilluminated by grace and blown by the winds of ideological fashion, is always capable of producing erroneous and even demonic hypotheses and categorical frameworks. But for the ecumenicism that is Left theology's intellectual counterpart to its

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social vision of love and community, such a mere reaffirmation of faith is insufficient in itself. If it is indeed true that the category of the human subject, individual or collective, is an illusion resting on a wish then a Christian anthropology and philosophy of history rooted in the time-bound conceptual universe of the nineteenth century must rethink the form in which its redemptive message to humanity is currently expressed. Such an exemplary approach — exemplary for atheist “as well as theist” forms of radical humanism — is the one taken by the influential Catholic ecumenist journal *Concilium* in its special 1973 issue, recently republished under the title *Humanism and Christianity*.<sup>27</sup>

For about fifteen years now [writes Claude Geffré in the opening editorial] theologians have said again and again that, although we have a “theology,” we have no “anthropology.” An attempt was made to correct this situation in the Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) and this was followed by a number of Christian anthropologies.... Now, however, in their anxiety to take part in dialogue with atheistic humanists, Christians may seriously ask themselves whether their thinking about Man is not lagging behind that of the atheists, whose most meaningful contribution nowadays is in the sphere of anti-humanism...; has not man, Foucault has asked, “discovered that he is neither at the centre of creation, nor in the middle of space, nor even at the summit or at the end of life?” This new form of atheism criticises both atheistic and Christian humanism.... Does the permanently present reality of the gospel message concerning man have to be made manifest or does a certain ideological conception of Western man have rather to be defended by making that conception sacral?<sup>28</sup>

The essays in the book attempt to resolve this dilemma by exploring the protocol of a theological appropriation which, while critical of the nihilism that gives structuralist denegation of the subject its contemporary cultural support, attempts at the same time to learn from insights into the human situation which the structuralist mutation makes possible. Ganoczy’s article “New Tasks in Christian Anthropology” is perhaps the clearest in sketching out the ground. For him, the construction of a rationally adequate Christian anthropology is more compromised by death of God theology than by Foucault’s death of Man.

To reduce the reality of God to the level of man is to make it impossible to answer the obviously urgent contemporary

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question as to whether we can express, discuss or address God at all. Seen in this light the formal object of Christian anthropology [*i.e.*, the nature of Man as revealed by the incarnation in Christ] is above all marked by faith, but this should not stand in the way of scientific knowledge, since the religious relationships, of which faith is a special form, provide us with a reality which can be analysed. Historical, sociological and even psychosomatic research can be carried out into religion and faith as universal, structural factors and into the aspects of the totality of man to which those factors belong. This in turn provides the arena in which communication can take place between Christian anthropology and other contemporary anthropologies.<sup>29</sup>

Within this encounter, Christian theology can derive especial benefits from a dialogue with structuralists.

It is above all because of its affinity with linguistic analysis and its consequent aim to interpret totality that structuralism is so relevant to the Christian understanding of man, which it can help to free from its misuse of mystical and of speculative theology, from its ambiguous and excessive employment of the concept of "love" and from its *a priori* tendency either to transcendentalise human existence or to isolate human freedom.<sup>30</sup>

The problem, then — and the writers of *Concilium* go no further than programmatic — is how to recover Marx's insight that the human essence is not an abstract quality inherent in all individuals but simply the actual ensemble of social relations and that this ensemble is itself an asymmetrical, overdetermined complex of structures that has no ("human") centre. However, to get from this ontological principle to the notion that Man is, nevertheless, by nature, a self-infinite being who has been granted the possibility of utopian self-realization, involves a logical leap which they gloss over. Indeed, it remains an unresolved (and scarcely examined) paradox at the centre of post-structuralist attempts to construct a transformist anthropology that to become the conscious subject of its own social development the human species must be able to grasp the materialist sense in which its social constitution and history have no subject at all. Left theology, in other words, needs a non-eclectic dual ontology.

Whatever the shortcomings of *Humanism and Christianity*, and however confined its discussion may be to specifically Catholic themes, it does attempt to learn what structuralism can offer theology. No such measured and ecumeni-

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cal a response, however, is to be discerned among humanists of the Marxist and neo-Marxist Left. Althusser, who carried the structuralist message into the heart of Marxism, has been the object of particularly fierce denunciation. The Catholics of *Concilium* may shrink from defending and sacralising "a certain ideological conception of Western Man" — but not Garaudy, Sartre, Mandel, Kolakowski, Glucksmann, Piccone and hundreds of lesser lights.<sup>31</sup> It is almost as though there has been an international competition to see who can produce the most definitive refutation.

The irony of this apoplectic reaction is that Althusser himself in the essays that deal most explicitly with the topic (notably "Marxism and Humanism"<sup>32</sup> and "Ideology and the State"<sup>33</sup>) outlines a framework for thinking about humanist ideology which allows, in a way that more Hegelian forms of Marxism typically do not, for a non-reductionist conceptualisation of the religious and theological issues involved. In fact, despite his polemically objectivistic stance, Althusser's thought, sympathetically understood, has a positive contribution to make to the formation of Left theology — and not least because his integration of classical (French) sociology with Marxist vocabulary facilitates materialist theological discussion.

While admittedly still trapped in a positivist mis-identification of science with truth and ideology with illusion,<sup>34</sup> Althusser does free himself from the wholly ideological definition of ideology as the false consciousness of an alienated social order destined to disappear in the transparency of a free community. For Althusser, ideology — comprehended as the symbol systems and ritual practices through which the individual is subjectively inserted into the social order as an oriented agent and actor — is, to the contrary, an irreducible structural dimension of any social formation. The dominant ideology, reproduced in individuals through their participation in the ritual activity of dominant ideological apparatuses, plays the indispensable function of helping to reproduce the social relations of production on which, however organised, every society materially depends. Ideology does not disappear with the construction of a post-capitalist order: it simply requires and acquires a new content. Citizens in a society in transit to socialism and communism need to imagine their relation to the world in a way that corresponds to the aims and imperatives of this transition.

Althusser regards the recent emergence of a (theologically conversant) Marxist humanism with some ambivalence. On the one hand, its hypostasisation of Man, its teleological imagination and its emancipatory yearning must be eliminated, along with all other subjective fixations, from the conceptual organon brought to bear in a scientific analysis of history and of its conjectural "situations." On the other hand, as an ideology around which to consolidate "progressive" forces in the West, or to motivate and legitimate economic planning in the U.S.S.R., the rhetoric of socialist humanism — which like all

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ideology is lived and not just propagated — is valid and even irreplaceable.

This, however, is only a transitional solution. The ideology which Althusser conceives to be appropriate for the post-class society on the horizon of the contemporary revolutionary process is something more than the socialist humanism currently in vogue in neo-Christian and neo-Hegelian circles — more, even, than the “philosophy of praxis” that Gramsci envisaged as Christianity’s post-capitalist ideological successor. For Althusser, Gramsci at least had the wisdom to recognize the function ideology fulfils in the sphere of social reproduction; but at the same time he overlooked the discontinuity between the Marxist world-view that would prevail in post-class society and ideologies of the pre-communist type — in the qualitatively higher level of rationality, indeed thoroughgoing scientificity, exhibited by the former. Certainly a communist society will have a prevailing ideology, but it will be “an ideology which will depend on a science this time.”<sup>35</sup> How this apparent circle can be squared — what it means for ideology, which partially subsists in the subjective domain of unconscious desires and projection, to be “based” on science — is, however, something Althusser refrains from revealing.

The Comteian flavour of Althusser’s formulation of the ideological question is unmistakable, and it is indeed remarkable how the Hegelianising denunciations of his thought miss the obvious cultural point that Althusser’s whole polemic in part expresses: the return into Marxist discourse of its repressed French — *i.e.*, St. Simonian — heritage. There is certainly more than a parallel between Comte’s theologically and sociologically self-conscious adumbration of a fully positivised Humanist religion and the ideological solutions at which Althusser hints. Of course, Althusser does not identify himself as Pope of Humanity, nor does he conceive there to be a need for new religious organisation. But his terminology of ritual, subjectivity, ideology-as-material-reality and ideological apparatus, does point towards a quasi-Comteian ecclesiology, albeit one whose specific features are veiled in ambiguity. Certainly more questions are raised than answered. If, as he says, the School replaces the Church as the dominant ideological apparatus in advanced capitalism, what apparatus is to be dominant in the socialist society that comes next? The Party, as the guardian of Marxism-Leninism? Or organised science, as the guardian of scientificity? And how do they interpenetrate? But the real problem with Althusser here is not so much that his ecclesiology is vague and underdeveloped as that it is unambiguously hierarchical and centralist — just as the religiosity it expresses, for all its genuine humanist pathos, is that of what Bloch called Marxism’s “cold” current.

Finally, even the structuralist demolition of the category of the human subject — radical humanism’s sacral object *par excellence* — contains a religious insight worth pondering rather than simply dismissing out of hand as inadmissible according to first ideological principles. The main doctrinal

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heresy, it will be recalled, that differentiated Buddhism from the Brahmanism of the Upanishads, was its denial of the real existence of Atman — the self. The meditative project of achieving cosmic consciousness and subjective victory over mortality through grasping the spiritual essence of the inner self, was abandoned by Gautama as illusory: the self has no centre, and the “ego” is just a temporary complex of materiality. Seen in these terms, the structuralist attack on the myth of the Subject — which Althusser perceives to be at the heart of all theism — is not to be understood as merely the intellectual expression of contemporary nihilism and despair in the possibilities and intrinsic value of Man. It should be seen, also, as a moment in a process of orientalisation required to mutate prevailing Western consciousness so as to bring its spirituality into phase with the demythologised and materialist outlook appropriate to a species that has begun to acquire the technical and social capacity to determine, within the limits of circumstances, its own destiny.

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### Notes

1. In its most uncompromising form, the “death of God” tendency has been associated with Protestant liberalism. In England, the *locus classicus* is John Robinson’s *Honest to God*, London: SCM, 1963, and in North America, the leading proponents in the sixties were T.J. Altizer, William Hamilton and Paul M. Van Buren. Somewhat more muted projects of Christian demythologisation have been proposed by such Catholic liberals as Hans Kung, Andrew Greeley, Rosemary Reuther, William F. Lynch and Gregory Baum.
2. Viteslav Gardavsky, *God Is Not Yet Dead*, London: Penguin, 1973.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 208.



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12. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
15. Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology*, New York/Paramus/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1975.
16. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930*, New York: Vintage, 1961.
17. Baum, p. 194.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-5.
20. This issue has already received some attention from contemporary feminist theorists. See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, and Carol Ochs, *Behind the Sex of God*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1977.
21. Baum, pp. 178-81. The Christological typology discussed in these pages was formulated by Richard Niebuhr in his *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
22. Baum, p. 272.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
24. Gardavsky, p. 203.
25. The three most important collections of Althusser's work that predate his *Eléments d'Auto-critique* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1974) have been translated into English under the titles *For Marx* (Allen Lane: the Penguin Press, 1969), *Reading Capital*, (London: NLB, 1970), and *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971). In the *Auto-critique* Althusser criticises himself for theoreticism — a deviation he attributes to the influence not of Comte, as one might expect, but of Spinoza.
26. The Comteian notion that new sciences become established through a *coupure épistemologique* in which a new object for knowledge is theoretically instituted in rupture with an ideological conception, was developed in modern form by Althusser's teacher Gaston Bachelard. For Bachelard's discussion of the history of the pseudo-object "fire" in the pre-scientific development of physics see his *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
27. *Concilium*, 86, *Humanism and Christianity*, ed., Claude Geffré, New York: Herder and Herder, 1973.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
31. For three first-rate examples of this genre, see Henri Lefevre's *Au-delà du Structuralisme*, Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1971; André Glucksman's "A Ventriloquist Structuralism" (*New Left Review*, no. 72, March-April 1972); and Frouquet *et. al.*, "Généalogie du Capital,

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2. L'idéal Historique," which comprises the text of *Récherches*, no. 14, Jan. 1974 (Paris, 103, Boulevard Beaumarchais). From within the milieu influenced by Saussurian linguistics, perhaps the common coin of French structuralism, there has in recent years arisen a body of internal critique which seeks to reinstall, albeit in drastically de-Hegelianised terms, the initially banished category of the subject. Basing themselves more or less on Voloshinov's late twenties synthesis of Marxism and structural linguistics, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Languages*, New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973, Lacan, Kristeva and Derrida have carried discussion way beyond the point of development marked by Althusser's celebrated and dogmatic formulations of the early sixties. A useful summary of this development for English-speaking readers is to be found in Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

32. In *For Marx*.

33. In *Lenin and Philosophy*.

34. *Eléments d'Auto-Critique*, pp. 41-53.

35. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, p. 131.

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