

Who was Karl Marx?

I. Introduction

Karl Marx is without question one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, and continues to be in the 21st. His thought infiltrates every cultural institution in every country of the world almost without exception. **If there ever was a polar opposite to the Christian worldview, Marxism would be it.** Scholars estimate that as many as 100-200 million people have died because of this man's ideas, yet it continues to have an inordinate attraction, and seems to be gaining strength in our own country. The sad thing is the almost total unawareness that Marxist ideas are even now infiltrating our Evangelical churches, seminaries, and Christian Colleges. So, who is this man?

Karl Marx has had more impact on actual events, as well as on the minds of men and women, than any other intellectual in modern times. Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals*, p.52.

II. Brief Biography of Karl Marx

- A. Karl Marx was born in the little village of Trier in 1818 in what was then the country of Prussia (now Germany). He was Jewish by birth and the descendant of several prominent rabbis on both the side of his father and mother. Because of antisemitism in Prussia at that time, Marx's father converted to Protestant Christianity. Young Karl was confirmed at the age of 16 but abandoned Christian belief soon after.. He studied the classics at the university and took a doctorate at Jena University. Because it was a lesser known university he never seemed to be able to get tenure as a professor. As a scholar, he had grandiose plans for publishing but had an affinity for never quite finishing anything. His major publication attributed solely to him was the pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*. His *magnus opus* was to be *Das Capital* which he gets credit for, but only Volume 1 was actually written by him; Friedrich Engels ended up writing vols. 2 and 3 in what was projected to be an 8 volume work. The manuscripts for *DC* were not discovered till after his death (1883) in 1911. What is little known about Marx is that he was a rather prolific poet of over 100 poems of which only about 40 have survived. Most of this poetry is what today you would call *dark*. And, strangely enough in these poems, he seems to have a fascination with the devil, leading some scholars to postulate a pact with Satan. One of his biographers even intimates that he was demon-possessed (Payne).
- B. To say he was not a nice guy is an understatement! He never actually held a job that involved any physical labor. The only employment he seems to have ever had was as the European editor of the *New York Daily Tribune* for which he contributed a very polemic 500 articles. Due to his chronic laziness he constantly suffered from financial difficulties putting his family in extreme hardship. Together he and his wife had 7 children with only three reaching adulthood. After they moved to England his wife received an inheritance and they hired a maid. Marx had an additional child with this maid. Two of his daughters committed suicide, and one child may have died due to mal-nutrition. He was a known philanderer and drunkard. He was also known for extremely poor hygiene, body odor, and for never bathing!

III. Major Elements of His Philosophy

- A. **The basic idea of Marxist thought is *dialectical materialism*.** The word *dialectical* means the tensions between two opposites; these two opposing ideas combine to form a synthesis. In time, something then comes to oppose the synthesis and the process continues. He borrowed this idea from Hegel who applied it to the spiritual. But under the influence of Feuerbach (*The Essence of Christianity*, one of the most anti-Christian books ever written!) Marx applied it to the physical struggle between classes. He believed that material-matter was the basis for reality which is constantly changing, i.e., a dialectical process. It is through this lense of dialectical materialism that Marxists view class struggle. It also explains today why Marxists approve of violence. When two ideas go at it physically a new synthesis will emerge. Marxists believe each time this occurs a higher order is

achieved. Remember somebody recently saying: *Never let a good crisis go to waste?*

- B. Marx was a utopian. He believed the struggle of opposites just explained above, would eventually result in the redemption of man; the need for government and private property would vanish. This he believed would be pure communism. His followers today are not as optimistic. Most average IQ thinkers can easily see this is nonsense.
- C. Marxism is primarily a view of social, economic, and political theory. His worldview thinking (at least in his writing) did not consist of a grand narrative. He was mainly only interested in these three areas.
- D. Marxist cultural criticism. As a result of Marx's political and economic theories, followers developed a theory of art, and how to critique any work of art. There are varieties, but what they have in common is that any work of art must be seen in the light of the social, cultural, and historical condition in which it has been produced. This has many similarities to present-day postmodern criticism where any work of art is evaluated on how it oppresses some group. This is very Marxist.
- E. In the field of morals and ethical value, Marx believed that morals were just rationalizations of economic interests decided by, and enforced by the state.
- F. Marxist eschatology: yes, his eschatology! In Christianity it has to do with the doctrine of the future. For Marx, it is about moving from capitalism, to socialism, and ultimately to communism where there would be no need for government. Somehow he believed through his evolutionary beliefs it was inevitable that man would evolve to that point. The important thing to note here, is that Marx and his followers believe this is not only inevitable, but irresistible; it's written into their materialism. It's why Marxists do not get discouraged at setbacks; they believe victory of the proletariat is written into the cards!
- G. Marx wanted everyone to believe that his view of materialism was scientific. In the 19th century that had large appeal. He was likewise, a big follower of Darwin, and there is evidence the two corresponded. Darwin viewed life as a struggle, i.e., *the survival of the fittest*. Darwinism in the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th, was applied to all areas of life, giving us *social Darwinism*. This had big appeal to the followers of Marx.
- H. Marx believed that the workers should own the means of production: the essence of communist belief. It's the first thing that happens in a communist takeover; they nationalize industry. He believed that in capitalism the worker is exploited because the owner sold what the worker produced for a profit.

IV. The Spread of Marxism

The milieu of the late 19th century with its unbounding optimism (*onward and upward*) caused Marxist ideas to spread rapidly. Russia, where it bloomed under Marxist Bakunin, Trotsky, and Lenin, eventually led to the Russian Revolution in 1917. In only a few more decades, it spanned the globe. After WWII it became entrenched in Eastern Europe. While it suffered significantly near the end of the 20th century when much of Eastern Europe, even the old Soviet Union, moved away from its extreme inhumane governance, but it never completely died. The head of the snake was not severed, and various forms of Marxism are again flourishing, liberation theology in South America as one example. The current Pope is an ardent follower and advocate.

V. The Various Forms of Marxism

Marx's writings were dense and not well-organized into any kind of systematic and logical way. Biographers admit that most of *Das Kapital* is like a series of political pamphlets pieced together. It remained for his followers to refine and enhance his works. These men; Bakunin, Lukacs, Lenin, Adler, Adorno, etc. Some examples of the varieties of Marxism:

- A. Classical Marxism: CM believed in violent overthrow via revolutions that were necessary to topple the entrenched bourgeoisie (capitalists). The revolutionary struggle would ultimately lead to a Communist Utopia. Stalin, Mao, Castro, and others are vivid examples.
- B. Democratic Socialism: Scandinavian countries opted for this form. Socialism was on the ballot and voted into power by its citizens. It is a system where large corporations are allowed to function, but are highly controlled by government regulation as in the German variant, Fascism. These corporations then become *cash cows* to support government programs that are intended to bring about the equality of all citizens. Some Marxists believed that this socialism would then inevitably lead to communism where man evolves, is redeemed (so to speak), and there is no longer any need for government or privately owned property. What has proven to be the case, however, is that sooner or later you run out of capital, then the state has to allow some free markets, or limited capitalism as in China today.
- C. The Frankfurt School: The FS is also known as Cultural Marxism. A. Gramsci, who popularized this form believed that violent revolution is not the answer to get to the ideal Marxist Society. Gramsci believed in subversion of the major cultural institutions over time. First, have Marxists get quietly in control of higher education, the media, the arts, etc. then socialism will come about by free choice. Interesting quote by noted preacher, Voddie Baucham: *Social Justice is a cultural Marxist concept gaining traction in Christian circles.* (See more about social justice below)
- D. Liberation Theology: Liberation Theology was actually founded by the Russian KGB to infiltrate the Catholic Churches with communism in Latin America. What it is, is a lot of Marxism and very little Christianity. It had great appeal initially, because of extremely poor living conditions in most of Latin America. It had promise of bringing about a great egalitarian society. Like all other forms of Marxism it is contrary to nature, in particular, the nature of man. Jesus is seen as The Great Liberator that will free man from his oppressors.

V. A Critique of Marxism

- A. There is no empirical evidence to support any of Marx's theories, yet he loudly proclaimed them as scientific. What they really represent in all honesty is his own biographical situation: he was a rebel and hated work!
- B. Marxism is totally at odds with our constitution (surely you've noticed this!) Which has a foundation in a biblical worldview.

VI. A Christian Critique of Marxism

- A. The Bible affirms the principle of private property and ownership, while Marxism believes it leads to inequality and oppression. The Bible does not believe that the state is Messianic as in Marxism. In the fact, the Bible views it as a necessary force to restrain fallen man.
- B. While a Christian believes in Moral absolutes based on God's character, Marx believes values originate in the state. The good is what furthers communism.
- C. Humans are a product of matter (impersonal time plus chance). Christians believe man has inherent dignity because he is created in God's image.
- D. Men aren't equally gifted. We may believe that all men are created equal, meaning before God, or equal opportunity, but Marx believed in equal outcomes. That's why in the old Soviet Union a street sweeper made the same wage as a surgeon. Even now the rationalization is that if all men are equal we would no longer have quarrels or war! You can't understand contemporary liberalism without understanding this idea of radical egalitarianism.

- E. Men are morally flawed and in need of supernatural spiritual regeneration. Marx would say also, that men need redemption (maybe not with this term), and will have it in time. Socialism will ultimately bring on perfection.
- F. Marx saw Christianity as the number one enemy of his crazy economic theories. Every known example of a communist country has been hostile to Christianity and religion in general, unless it could be used in some way as in Liberation Theology.

VII. Conclusion

- A. The insidious and devilish philosophy of Marx is making an incredible comeback in our own country. Are you aware of *The Great Awokening*? Have you heard of Critical Race Theory? Currently, as I write, Marxist ideas are up for a vote; churches, Christian Colleges, and Seminaries are beginning to view these ideas favorably. These unbiblical ideologies are propagated in this way: Aren't Christians supposed to be concerned about racism, inequality, oppression, poverty, etc. Yes, absolutely! But, and that's a big BUT, God wants us to deal with these issues in a biblical way by seeing man as he really is, in need of spiritual redemption.
- B. Marxism is an evil ideology and perhaps Satan's masterpiece of deception. According to a recent Barna survey, 36% of practicing Christians now accept Socialist ideas! Once politically conservative Christian institutions are now coming out in favor of variants of socialism. Personally, I believe this should be a cause for great alarm. Marxism is the sworn enemy of the Gospel and must be opposed. One has to ask the question sooner or later: What is this appeal of Marx? Why does it hold most of the world in its grip? It appeals to man's sin nature that you can have something for nothing, it thrives on envy; the Marxist state gives a false sense of security that it will always be there to meet your needs. It claims to idealist young people that the State, i.e., socialism, will rid the world of its ills. Vic Biorseth says:

The false Utopian claim that Communism will eventually feed all the people and eliminate hunger from the world is the seemingly moral bait that draws in the young, the idealistic, the naive and the inexperienced. Communism does exist, and Socialism is among the most closed, menacing, inexhaustible, uncharitable and impoverishing government systems in existence.

Every where Marxism has been implemented into a state government it has failed. We have plenty of empirical evidence. Yet the cry of the intellectual is: *it will work if only it is implemented by the right people!*

Marx is known for this quote: *Religion is the opiate of the people.* In reality: Marxism is the opiate of intellectuals!

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