

upon ourselves, and withdraw our feelings—a syndrome evident from the novels of Iris Murdoch, who seems, however, to endorse it, and to seek to persuade us it doesn't matter. Dr May quotes the director of a student health service at the University of Wisconsin:

the girls who, in these days of the pill, are promiscuous say . . .
'It's too much trouble to say no'. . . .

The implication is that it is too much trouble to be human, and to be oneself, in touch with one's own deepest needs, and one's intentionality.

'Enlightenment' has itself prompted this carelessness about doing violence to oneself, and the banalization which attends it. It has encouraged sexual activity without responsibility, along with all kinds of false solutions by which individuals insult their true selves—until they find themselves in the consulting room. This distinguished book, based on what they reveal there, exposes the malaise of which 'enlightenment' itself is a radical part, whose influence on us stands in the way of the release of our best potentialities.

Faith and Revolution

by Terry Eagleton

A good deal has been written, in the pages of *New Blackfriars* and elsewhere, about the points of theoretical convergence between Christianity and Marxism: their shared practical-materialist humanism and historicity, their common goal of an eschatological liberation from alienation through powers embodied in the dispossessed and so on. The question I want briefly to raise in this article is where, given all this, the two perspectives diverge.

To enumerate a series of doctrines held by the Christian and rejected by the Marxist is clearly no answer in itself to this problem. Marxists manifestly differ from Christians in rejecting God, the Virgin Mary, the eucharist, hell and any number of other such beliefs, but this can't in itself constitute the decisive point of divergence, for the simple reason that a Christian is not a humanist who subscribes simultaneously to a set of transcendental propositions. No doctrinal difference can *in itself* supply the point of divergence, since Christian faith isn't an intellectualist affair; if faith is to mean more than a subscription to certain categories which can be tacked on to the Marxist perspective as a kind of surplus value, it must manifest itself in a *praxis* peculiar, in some sense, to Christians.

Most current attempts¹ to distinguish Christianity from Marxism by virtue of the Church's commitment to a transcendental perspective which cuts below and beyond the Marxist's perspective seem to run this risk of emptying faith to an intellectual extra. Unless that transcendental perspective can be realistically 'cashed' in a qualitative difference of life-style and historical practice, it remains a redundant category, a merely theoretical divergence which can be contemplated but not appropriated. The Christian, like the Marxist, is committed to a unity of theory and practice; and there is something radically inimical to that doctrine, as it is held on both sides of the fence, in the familiar spectacle of Christian and Marxist tipping their hats to the respectively 'absolute' and 'indeterminate' character of each other's notion of the future and then buckling down to a spot of co-operation on race relations.

Any practical 'cashing' of the Christian's more deep-seated commitment to the resurrection of the body raises, however, important difficulties. Few revolutionary Christians would want to hold that there can be some specifically 'Christian' revolutionary practice, any more than they would hold that specifically Christian radio-stations or pet-shops made sense. The role of Christians is not to create their own revolutionary organizations but to participate in the building and activation of a common revolutionary movement. Yet what then becomes of the distinctive Christian theory of history? How are we to steer between, on the one hand, an intellectualist reductionism which leaves faith hanging in the air above Christian historical practice, and, on the other hand, an insistence that faith must show up in a distinctive form of *praxis* which runs into the traditional Christian mistake of redundantly duplicating common social institutions?

There are various ways around this problem, of which the most persuasive is the 'permanent revolution'² or 'revolution within the revolution' theory. On this theory, the distinctive practice of revolutionary Christianity lies in its permanently critical, negative, transcending role within a revolutionary society, its function in symbolizing, and so embodying a permanent drive towards, an ultimate social order (the kingdom of God) transcendent of any political *status quo*. I accept this theory wholly, but not as defining the point of divergence between Christian and Marxist, since its implicit version of the Marxist theory of history is simply naïve. It forgets that the revolution is, for Marxism, the inauguration, not the culmination, of authentic human history: the creation of a social condition in which ceaseless conflict development, self-criticism and self-transcendence would be possible. It rests, in other words, upon an equation of Marxism with Stalinism: upon an

¹Including my own, in *The Body As Language*.

²It is maybe worth pointing out that the way this term has recently been used by Christian revolutionaries (including myself) has almost no relation at all to its original Trotskyite meaning.

implication that a fetishizing of the socialist order is an inherent element of Marxist theory and practice. Even if it were, there would be no reason why a monopoly of continuous criticism should be cornered by the Church—no reason why the Church should not be simply one element within a series of ‘Left Oppositions’, of the kind led by Trotsky against Stalin.

The relations between revolutionary theory and practice within Christianity, then, remain vague; if the socialist revolution must be, for the Christian, in some sense ‘ordered towards’ the kingdom of God (the phrase is Herbert McCabe’s), what precise kind of practice does this imply? An ethical emphasis at odds with the Marxist’s, on, say, the uses and limits of violence? A critical reminder that the full liberation of man is yet to be achieved? Neither of these positions seems to me satisfactory: the second for reasons I have briefly sketched, the first because I don’t believe that the issue of violence is in theory, or is likely to be in practice, the decisive one. Some more crucial divergence, which arises from the Christian’s transcendental perspective yet is at the same time cashable in historical practice, seems to be called for, if we are not to drive an anti-Wittgensteinian wedge between description and behaviour.

It seems to me that the clearest *theoretical* difference between Christianity and Marxism lies in the Christian belief that the kingdom is of God and not just of man. One crucial implication of this is that, for the Christian, the coming of the kingdom is *certain*: certain *because* it is of God. The Marxist, however, clearly cannot believe that the realm of freedom is assured to man, unless he espouses some wholly non-Marxist theory of historical determinism. He has to confront the reality which has deeply transformed every aspect of the twentieth-century sensibility at one blow: the H-bomb. He has to acknowledge that a few well-placed nuclear missiles can scupper the whole Marxist enterprise for good: that the revolution can be irrevocably lost. For the Christian, however, the revolution can never be irrevocably lost, even if—as seems reasonably likely—history ends in nuclear holocaust. Even *that* would not prevent the coming of the kingdom, for the kingdom does not come as top Doh in the lyrically ascending tune of history. It is in (revolutionary) continuity, not with the final state to which human history arrives, but with the underlying significant trajectory of history itself: the project of building human community, of which the Church is sacrament. It is the *pleroma* of every historical struggle to affirm man’s humanity, including those which, in historical terms, dismally fail. The kingdom need not arrive as the revolutionary transformation of a liberated society wrestled from the materials of history; it arrives as the culminating transformation of all historical attempts to bring it about.

Those historical attempts are themselves, of course, an essential condition of the kingdom’s arrival. The kingdom will not come

whether we work for it or not; but nor is it exactly true that it will only come if we work for it. Rather, the fact that it *will* come—that it is a given, determinate reality—is what empowers us to work freely for its attainment. The relation between the kingdom and history, that is, has the same dialectical ambivalence as the relation between grace and free-will; indeed it is the historical dimension of that dialectic. It is therefore false to think that the certainty of the kingdom's coming relieves Christians from the necessity of struggling to achieve it; its certainty works a quite different effect, which is what I want to explore.

The fact that the Christian's sights are fixed not only on the specific historical success of a particular revolutionary venture, but, simultaneously, on the fruitfulness of that venture (even if it historically fails) in building up the future kingdom, should have one obvious effect: it should make the Christian struggle harder. Where the Christian differs from the Marxist is that he has an underlying purpose, a deeper dimension, for furthering any revolutionary project: he relates it simultaneously to history and to the kingdom.¹ And what may be lost to history will not, he believes, be lost to the kingdom, once the kingdom is grasped as the *pleroma* and culmination of all such attempts. Revolutionary Christian faith, then, should make its difference felt most in situations where the fight seems historically fairly hopeless: it ought to provide the dynamic for perpetuating that fight against what seem like desperate odds, in the certainty that the struggle will finally bear fruit, if not on this side of history, then on the far side of the *parousia*. In this sense, the Christian's transcendental perspective—his ordering of the historical to the eschatological revolution—does the reverse of detaching him from the practical struggle: it actually intensifies his commitment to it.

There is here, perhaps, a rough analogy with the debates between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks adopted the line that the coming revolution in Russia would inevitably be bourgeois, and that the role of the proletariat was to wait on this event: to allow bourgeois society to consolidate itself and so create the objective conditions within which genuinely proletarian revolution would be, at some indeterminate future date, on the historical agenda. The Bolsheviks, while accepting that the coming revolution would be bourgeois, insisted that it should be led and activated by the working class, who would then complete and transcend that historical phase by carrying it through into socialism. Lenin, in other words, perceived a deeper dimension within the bourgeois struggle: a dimension which allowed for a considerably more militant engagement in the stage of bourgeois revolution than the Mensheviks them-

¹Of course it is true that a revolutionary movement like the Vietnamese National Liberation Front have a deeper dimension within their own specific conflict: that of the liberation of *all* men within history. But the Christian believes that something would still be gained even if that general liberation historically fails.

selves countenanced. The Mensheviks viewed the bourgeois revolution as the most immediate historical reality, and proletarian victory as a remote figment; the Bolsheviks viewed the bourgeois revolution *provisionally*, as a phase through which the real, approaching victory of the proletarian and peasant alliance was manifested. Because the bourgeois phase was seen in this radically provisional light, it could be engaged with all the more determinedly, grasped as the prelude to the realm of freedom.

The Christian provisionality *vis-à-vis* historical revolution has a similarly intensifying effect. It does not license a merely hesitant and qualified allegiance to immediate revolutionary conflict; on the contrary, it licenses an allegiance all the more thoroughgoing because, in some direct way, the eventual salvation of all men (past, present and future) shines through that conflict, and continues to shine even through its failure.

It is important to differentiate this position from mere adventurism. To carry on struggling in what one is morally certain is a hopeless situation is not only madness; it is also, from a revolutionary viewpoint, counter-productive. If the National Liberation Front of Vietnam were able to somehow peer into the future and see that their present war would end in total disaster, it is just possible that they would carry on with it even so, on the Camusian and Sorelian principle that only in such hopeless existential defiance could their negated humanity be re-established; but the blood of their fruitlessly decimated comrades would then be on their head. The Camusian ethic, of continuing to affirm and struggle even in the face of total hopelessness, can only be individualistic, as Camus himself recognizes; to generalize this to a revolutionary situation is to warrant suicide, not martyrdom. The Christian's faith that the kingdom *will* come, that history is on his side, cannot issue in a merely indiscriminate readiness to risk destruction in each and every confrontation; the certainty of the final liberation of humanity on the far side of history doesn't, naturally, entail the success of any particular revolutionary project on this side of the kingdom. What that certainty does entail, however, is a readiness on the part of the Christian to sacrifice himself in a revolutionary cause whose outcome seems far from assured; and there are few enough men prepared to do this to make the Christian contribution to the revolutionary process an essential and distinctive one. The Christian is ready to do this, not only because it is the crucial test of his own personal salvation, but because of his faith that it is by virtue of such historically problematic actions that the kingdom is constructed—that salvation will be made available to all men. By centring his life around a liturgy of death and resurrection, the Christian is able to struggle and suffer confidently because of his trust in the Father's plan to raise him after crucifixion, even when he is to all intents and purposes forsaken. Because the object of Christian faith is the *certainty* of Christ's coming,

and because participation in his kingdom is won only through martyrdom, the Christian ought to be rather more ready to die than the Marxist, for whom the future society must, inevitably, be radically unsure, and for whom personal death is an absolute end. To put the matter in a deliberately external and appropriating way: what would be extremely useful to any revolutionary movement would be the presence of a number of men who believed that what hinged on the degree of intensity with which they fought was not simply historical liberation for themselves and others, but eternal life. A number of non-Christian revolutionaries of my acquaintance would certainly be prepared to die, and gladly, if they thought that the action had a reasonable chance of furthering the revolutionary cause; not many, understandably, would be ready to face extinction if the chances of political victory were extremely slender. Yet there comes a point, in many revolutionary processes, where a precarious twilight area opens up between calculative probability on the one hand, and self-squandering adventurism on the other; and this may just be the area that Christians are called on to occupy.

The answer, then, to the problem of how the transcendent object of Christian faith is to show up in some sort of distinctive *praxis*—and so to be more than intellectualist—without running the opposed risk of producing some special 'Christian' brand of revolutionary activity, is that Christian faith ought to enable men to be *better* revolutionaries. Its role is to *intensify* common revolutionary practice, rather than to replace it with something else or merely add an extra series of doctrines to it. There are two objections to this conclusion, which deserve a brief mention. One is that, on any empirical survey of contemporary Christian behaviour, it is very hard to believe. The other is that anyone who enunciates it seems to commit himself to being in the front line. Maybe if the first problem were overcome, and a significant number of Christians came to embrace this theory of their specific revolutionary role, the second problem would become less worrying.

Plus ç'a change—Plus c'est la même chose

or On Leaving the Dominican Order in 1870

by Bede Bailey, O.P.

'Of course you English Dominicans have had a terrible time recently, losing relatively more priests than anyone else.' My journalist friend's job is to know facts and comment on them, and he was saddened at our dilapidated state. So I thought I'd look at the figures.