

# Bloch's Messianic Marxism

John Marsden

Wrote Ernst Bloch, the German Marxist:

Once man has comprehended himself and has established his own domain in real democracy, without depersonalization and alienation, something arises in the world which all men have glimpsed in childhood: a place and a state in which no one has yet been. And the name of this something is home or homeland.

Esoteric and often frustratingly organised, his utopian philosophy has been dismissed, by Christians and Marxists alike, as a confused and idiosyncratic amalgam of heresies. Yet within his writings, which span half a century<sup>1</sup> (born in 1885, he died at nine-two), there can be shown to be a remarkable unity of thought. Furthermore, themes and perspectives can be discerned which arguably continue even today to be of relevance to both Christianity and Marxism and to the dialogue between them, and which make Bloch a philosopher of more than just historical interest.

The central thesis of his work was that Marxism had become distorted and impoverished through the exclusion of utopian elements. He considered that within the Marxist tradition there had been too great a progress from utopia to science, and he sought to revitalise Marxism through a creative incorporation of utopianism. (Initially he spoke in terms of adding a utopian dimension to Marx, but later came to recognise the utopianism implicit in Marx<sup>2</sup>. His magnum opus, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*), set forth his fully developed system of theoretical messianism. Using a wide variety of sources, he showed the potency of the human yearning for a better world. Overwhelmingly, though, he took the Judaeo-Christian tradition as his model and inspiration, and attempted to claim the heritage of religious messianism for a renewed Marxism. In so doing he helped to re-assert the eschatological content of Christianity, and stimulated important developments in modern theology, most notably Jurgen Moltmann's 'theology of hope' and much of liberation theology.

## *Marxism as a Humanist Utopianism*

Bloch's Marxism is essentially humanist in its orientation: 'True Marxism, in its dynamics of the class struggle, and in its substantive goal, is, and must be, humanism and humanitarianism enhanced.' For Bloch,

the revolutionary project was concerned above all with the struggle for the full liberation of human potential from the dehumanisation of capitalist society. He was insistent that a humanist interpretation of Marxism is the only one faithful to Marx:

For Marx, the humane, even as a remote goal of the tendency of society, is completely dominant. Marxism properly pursued, effectively unburdening itself, and emancipating itself from evil neighbours, has been since its inception 'humanity in action', the human countenance coming to fulfilment.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Bloch emphasised the continuity in Marxist thought, and saw no contradiction between the early and later Marx.<sup>4</sup>

With himself and other middle-class intellectuals in mind, Bloch rhetorically asked: 'What has brought to the red flag those who did not, in a sense, need it?' For his answer he looked no further than Marx himself, who 'offers a secure paradigm for the red path of the intellect: the model of a humanism that concerns itself in action.'<sup>5</sup> Although he was highly critical of sentimental forms of socialism, Bloch placed a very strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of socialism: 'Love for mankind, insofar as it clearly understands itself as directed toward the exploited, and progresses toward true knowledge, is unquestionably an indispensable factor in socialism.'<sup>6</sup>

This recognition of the humanist foundations of Marxism does not in any way detract from the need for a detailed analysis of society, but only confirms it. 'The humanitarianism of Marx, as directed to the least of his brethren, proves itself in his endeavour to understand from their roots the degradation and induced nullity of most of his brethren, in order to attack their very roots.'<sup>7</sup> For Bloch, Marx's fourth thesis on Feuerbach—that the secular basis of human alienation must be 'understood in its contradiction and revolutionised in practice'—provides a positive mandate for both scientific analysis and revolutionary activity. It is quite mistaken to suppose that there is any conflict between the two:

The new proletarian standpoint does not in any way eliminate the value concept of humanism. On the contrary, it allows that concept to be realised for the first time. The more scientific socialism is, the *more concrete is the concern for man at its centre*, and the more certain is the real elimination of his self-alienation as its goal.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Bloch is insistent that scientific analysis should not obscure Marxism's utopian intention to transform the world. 'Marxism never renounces its heritage, and least of all the primal intention: the Golden Age. In all its *analyses* Marxism plays the part of a sober detective, yet takes the legend seriously, and reacts pragmatically to the *dream of the Golden Age*.'<sup>9</sup>

For Bloch, the realm of human freedom, which he calls the *regnum humanum*, to which all previous utopias point, constitutes Marxism's 'concrete utopia'. He also (as in the quotation with which this article opened) uses the term 'homeland' to describe the future unalienated socialist society. Bloch draws inspiration for this 'concrete utopia' from the *Paris Manuscripts* and Marx's radically utopian theme of the humanisation of nature and the naturalisation of man. In his revolutionary humanism Bloch sees the emergence of man's whole humanity in a transformed world as occurring through the historical process itself:

Marx indicates that his ultimate intention is 'the development of the wealth of human nature'. This *human* wealth, like that of *nature* as a whole, lies exclusively in the trend latency in which the world finds itself ... It follows that man everywhere is still living in prehistory, and that all things are still in the stage prior to the just and true creation of the world. *The true genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end.*

Central to Bloch's use of concrete utopia is his view that the future exists already in the present, in the form of latency. In a somewhat surprising departure for a professed Marxist, he uses the Aristotelian concept of 'entelechy', claiming that matter itself is in a process of development. He thus provides an ontology to support his utopian perspective.<sup>10</sup>

Bloch's concept of utopia must be distinguished from that of the utopian socialists, who lacked any notion of class struggle. His 'concrete utopia' presupposes the class struggle, and is directed towards revolutionary activity in line with the real tendencies of the historical situation. For him, utopian thought does not contradict, but rather enriches, historical materialism. Thus he speaks of the unity of 'sobriety' and 'enthusiasm', and maintains that Marxism has both a 'warm stream' and a 'cold stream'. The 'warm stream' which he identifies within Marxism refers to the revolutionary passion to change the world, along with man's capacity for hope and for 'dreaming ahead', while the 'cold stream' refers to Marxism's rigorous scientific analysis of society.<sup>11</sup>

Since revolutionary practice, while based on sober analysis, must be informed by an awareness of the final goal, Bloch is highly critical of economistic interpretations of Marxism which exclude both ideals and utopian ends. 'Ideal images', he writes, 'hasten ahead of and precede an objective historical tendency'. 'Concrete utopia', he contends, 'is bound up with historical materialism and prevents it from defaulting—prevents it from discarding its visions of a goal ahead and gives it the *novum* of dialectical-*utopian* materialism.'<sup>12</sup>

To describe the content of the authentic hope which is consistent with the Marxist vision of the future, Bloch uses the term *docta spes*, 'hope conceived in materialist terms'.<sup>13</sup> For the Marxist, hope, and its rational basis, must be held together in a dialectical unity: 'Reason

cannot blossom without hope, and hope cannot speak without reason: both must operate in a Marxist unity'.<sup>14</sup>

In his discussion of historical materialism, Bloch stresses the importance of superstructural elements, and assigns a relative autonomy to the superstructure, which he maintains contains a genuinely utopian surplus. The emphasis on the 'warm stream', on 'hope', 'dreaming ahead' and utopian imagination concerning the future socialist society, are all necessary to stimulate the creation of revolutionary consciousness. Bloch had a better insight into the nature of man than most of his Marxist contemporaries. Dry determinism and cold mechanistic dogma, however 'scientific', do not do justice to the complex interplay of emotional, psychological and spiritual, as well as rational, faculties that constitute the 'whole man'. Bloch's utopianism, however, is consistent with such a holistic anthropology.

What Bloch offers us are suggestive insights for restructuring historical materialism on the basis of a reassertion of the importance of consciousness, and a constructive use of the cultural legacies of the past. However, the sheer variety and complexity of the sources he uses, some of which seem very strange bedfellows with Marxism, raises the question of whether Bloch is too syncretistic a thinker. Many aspects of his thought are clearly far too mystical and fanciful to be considered compatible with Marxism. For example, social utopias are one thing, and Bloch's speculative materialism ('entelechy'), is quite another. Such an ontological basis for a Marxist utopianism does more to undermine than commend it.

### *Religion and Utopia*

Bloch's utopianism always remained deeply rooted in his interpretation of religion. In contrast to most scholars, who so often begin their discussion of utopianism with Thomas More's *Utopia*, Bloch regarded utopian thinking as a basic human propensity, and in his work on religion he traces its development from the early biblical period through Jewish and Christian history.

For Bloch, Scripture first becomes historical with the Exodus, which gives the Bible 'a basic tone it has not lost'.<sup>15</sup> The Exodus story tells of how a Bedouin tribe led by Moses is delivered from oppression and slavery by its God, Yahweh, who is henceforth understood as a God of liberation. After settling in the promised land of Canaan and adopting an agricultural way of life, these people still retain a deep memory of the nomadic institutions and primitive semi-communism that characterised their previous social organisation. However, in the agrarian society inherited from the Canaanites, there quickly emerges a sharp polarisation between rich and poor, and intense exploitation. It is in this context that Bloch locates the prophets: 'Amidst this exploitation the prophets appeared, thundering against it, projecting the judgment and

along with it the *very first plans for a social utopia*.<sup>16</sup> The prophets acted in league with the semi-nomadic opposition, the Nazarites and Rechabites, who kept alive the tradition of Yahweh as a God of the poor, to whom private property was completely alien.

Bloch points out that the prophets' denunciation of apostasy takes on its special significance from the way it represents the struggle between Yahweh the God of the poor and Baal the God of the expropriators. Yahweh is invoked as the enemy of the oppressors, and the judge of those who accumulate wealth at the expense of the poor. As prophetism develops, from the old image of a tribal God there eventually emerges an image which associates Yahweh with a definite socio-moral message. 'From Amos to Isaiah, and even further, the moral message was conceived of as Yahweh's primordial will: "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1. 7.).'<sup>17</sup> For the prophets, Yahweh becomes the embodiment of moral reason, and the God of liberation 'a true God of morality, an ideal God whose qualities could now really be a model for men.'<sup>18</sup> Along with this there comes the idea of free moral choice, which subjects fate to the power of human decision. Finally, at the height of the prophetic tradition there appears the messianic hopes of the future liberation that Yahweh, the Exodus God, will bring, not only for Israel but for all the nations of the earth. Thus the writings of Isaiah and Micah are filled with utopian visions, which form the basis of later Christian social utopias.

The fierce prophetic condemnation of injustice, and a taking up of the cause of the poor and exploited, is again, Bloch notes, evident with the Nazarite John the Baptist and Jesus himself. He sees Jesus as an eschatological prophet, whose Gospel of the Kingdom was essentially a proclamation of a new social order of love-communism. Only with the disaster of the cross was the Kingdom interpreted as lying beyond and above history, and Jesus' love-communism relaxed and spiritualised. Bloch is highly critical of Pauline Christianity, and observes how the call for a radically new social order was gradually replaced by a concentration on inwardness and belief in a beyond: 'Instead of a radical renewal of this world, an institute of the beyond appeared—the Church—and interpreted the Christian social utopia as referring to itself.'<sup>19</sup>

Bloch criticises Augustine for his accommodation with Rome and his lack of interest in the State, both of which follow from his exclusive preoccupation with God and the soul, and the Manichaean influences he did not entirely free himself from. He also objects to Augustine's interpretation of history, and in particular his tendency to equate the Church with the millennium: 'In Augustine's book' *civitas Dei* is hailed as virtually present in the Jewish Levi State and in the Church of Christ. So vast a dream as the millennium is sacrificed to the Church.'<sup>20</sup> However, Bloch recognises that elsewhere Augustine makes it clear that

the City of God will not fully appear until the end of present history: 'It is not in the existing world, nor beyond it, but after this world that the City of God appears in full'.<sup>21</sup> Bloch thus acknowledges that *civitas Dei* constitutes a political utopia. He also notes how *civitas Dei* itself challenged the Church's millennial claims, and that throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern age, chiliasm kept erupting.

It was with the revolutionary movements and heretical sects that chiliasm again came into its own. Bloch considers Joachim di Fiore to be especially important. Joachim taught that there were three stages of history—the stages of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These corresponded to the Old Testament 'stage of fear and of known law'; the New Testament 'stage of love and of a Church divided into clerks and laymen'; and the third stage of the Holy Spirit with 'the illumination of all men in a mystical democracy, without masters and without a Church.'<sup>22</sup> Joachim believed his own time to be that of the final kingdom, and he condemned passionately feudal and ecclesiastical rule. His message was essentially a return to the eschatological preaching of Christ. Bloch refers enthusiastically to Joachim's 'complete transfer of the kingdom of light *from the beyond, from the consolation of hoping for the beyond, into history*'.<sup>23</sup> Bloch identifies a whole tradition, stemming from Joachim, which included the Hussites, the Anabaptists, Münzer, and the Diggers, and concludes: 'Joachim was cogently the spirit of *revolutionary Christian social utopianism*'.<sup>24</sup>

Bloch's identification of an heretical strain in Christianity in line with the revolutionary and eschatological preaching of Jesus is undoubtedly instructive. Although he imposes too neat a classification upon these very diverse dissenting groups, the eschatological hopes suppressed by the Church did tend to migrate into these sects. Not surprisingly, and as Bloch himself notes, theologians and Church historians tend to give heretical groups a bad press, or to simply neglect them.<sup>25</sup> The present century, however, has seen a recovery of interest in chiliasm. Since Weiss and Schweitzer, New Testament theology has been forced to reconcile itself to the fact that Jesus was an apocalyptic and eschatological figure, with conceptions of the world quite foreign to modern man—at any rate, modern bourgeois man. The existence of a sharp break between Jesus and Paul also came in this century to be widely accepted, though insufficient attention has been paid to its implications. In addition, it has come to be widely recognised that, in becoming a state religion by the fourth century, the question of whether Christianity baptised Rome or vice versa is a very real one.

Bloch was well informed of developments in modern theology and in his own right has made some important contributions to theological debate. He observes that Weiss and Schweitzer, despite their brilliantly perceptive insights, eventually retreated to the safe haven of nineteenth century cultural Christianity.<sup>26</sup> He also gives an excellent critique of both

Bultmann and Barth, who in their different ways were responding to the breakdown of liberal protestantism and the rediscovery of eschatology.<sup>27</sup> He castigates Bultmann's use of Heideggerian existentialism in his treatment of myth, claiming that he replaces the eschatological, social and cosmic dimensions of reality with a preoccupation with mere individualism. Although commending Barth as a stalwart anti-Fascist, he rejects his conception of God as 'Utterly Other', and argues that, while Barth recognised the importance of eschatology, he confused it with 'other-worldliness', and consequently concluded that eschatology no longer has any real relationship with the world.

From a socialist viewpoint, the various revolutionary heretical movements which Bloch identifies were bound to fail, given the primitive social conditions in which they arose. However, although their hopes and aspirations were unrealisable at the time, they constitute a cultural legacy which assumes critical importance when the objective conditions for their fulfilment arise, and Bloch's appeal for socialism to enter into a creative inheritance of the traditions of the past, in order to inform its vision for actively transforming the future, is vital if socialist politics is more than a belief in determinism. To be sure, the utopian hopes of revolutionary chiliasm, as Bloch points out, need to be rectified (set 'on their feet'), but this happens through their incorporation into the 'concrete utopia' of the future socialist society. We have already referred to the importance of a 'holistic' anthropology. A particularly valuable contribution that chiliasm can make is to draw attention to the need for socialism to mobilise the deeper-lying vital and elemental levels of the human psyche, which Marxism has tended to neglect.<sup>28</sup>

### *Religious Inheritance*

Bloch's identification of the utopian dimension of religion led him to a thorough re-evaluation of the Marxist critique of religion. He recognised an ambiguity inherent in religion, and saw in Marx's 'opium' quote support for the claim that, along with acting as an ideology which confirms man in his situation of alienation, religion is also a *protest* against man's estrangement.<sup>29</sup> Bloch understood this ambiguity to be rooted in the situation which gives rise to religion, and he developed his analysis through a reconsideration of Feuerbach's work on religion.

Bloch had a very high estimation of Feuerbach, whom he considered to have advanced beyond much of the atheism of the enlightenment by addressing the problem of religious inheritance. Feuerbach's religious criticism had reduced theology to anthropology, making of religion a series of positive affirmations about man. Thus from religion there emerges a definite heritage, and Bloch commends Feuerbach for his insights in this respect: 'No one has made a more concerted effort than he did to turn the flow of human ideals away from the Beyond and back to man, whom these ideals reflect.'<sup>30</sup> However, Feuerbach's unhistorical

anthropology inhibited him from seeing the need for a utopian concept of man, rather than one which is statically settled. Accordingly, Bloch imaginatively reworks Feuerbach's anthropological critique of religion, replacing Feuerbach's reduction of the divine hypostasis to abstract 'species man', with the utopian ideal of the *humanum*, so that the *deus absconditus* becomes a *homo absconditus* which awaits realization. For Bloch, only atheism is consistent with messianism, since it makes possible the appearance of the very things theism devalued, and opens the way for real human freedom.

Bloch insisted that the utopian impulse implicit in religion still continues to exist when the illusion of an hypostasized deity has been shattered, since what was conceived as God is but a 'draft on the human content that has not yet appeared'.<sup>31</sup> He maintains that there is a wish-content and a depth of hope in religion which should be retained, and argues that Marxism needs to actively inherit the *topos* into which religion projects the God-postulate, replacing it with the utopia of the kingdom of freedom. The consequence of this is a creative union of historical materialism with religious utopianism, a union which is rooted in Bloch's process ontology, which completes his system of theoretical messianism. Thus he writes:

When dialectical materialism hears and grasps the import of the mighty voice of tendency in the world which it has made its own, and when it calls on men to work for the goal revealed by that voice, it shows decisively that it has taken hold of the living soul of a dead religion, the *transcendere* without transcendence, the subject-object of a well-founded hope. That is what lives on when the opium, the fool's paradise of the Other-world, has been burnt away to ashes. That remains as a call, signalling the way to the fulfilled This-world of a new earth.<sup>32</sup>

It is only when religion becomes a 'binding back' to a static, mythological God of the beginning, that Marxism must break with it. Within the Bible itself, there is a critique of this sort of religion, in favour of a religion which is radically utopian, and subversive of the present order. Thus Bloch sees a convergence between Marxism and a Christianity which substitutes the future Kingdom of God for a future kingdom of human freedom: 'Implicit in Marxism—as the leap from the Kingdom of Necessity to that of Freedom—there lies the whole so subversive and un-static heritage of the Bible: a heritage which, in the exodus from the static order, showed itself far more as pure protest, as the archetype of the Kingdom of Freedom itself.'<sup>33</sup> He uses the term 'meta-religion' to describe the Marxist inheritance of religion. As far back as Moses, 'instead of the visible nature god, there appears an invisible one of justice, of a kingdom of justice'.<sup>34</sup> He argues that within Judaeo-Christian history there is a progressive development away from



theism, toward's man's increasing self-injection into religious mystery.

Bloch raises the question of what exactly is left after the God-hypothesis is abandoned. Although he speaks confidently of the open *topos* which lies ahead, he concedes that 'nothingness and its futility is doubtless just as latent in the vacuum of atheism as the "all" of fulfilment by the *regnum humanum* or kingdom'.<sup>35</sup> This belief in the indeterminant outcome of history shows his position to be one which accords a special emphasis to subjective human agency. In the present nuclear age, where few would deny the potentially precarious nature of human history, Bloch's positing of the possibility of nothingness and futility has a special poignancy.

As well as opening up possibilities for revitalising Marxism, Bloch's analysis of religion is instructive in its own right. Most critiques of religion are concerned with explaining it away, and presuppose an acceptance of positivism (Freud and Durkheim) or nihilism (Nietzsche). In contrast, Bloch takes the religious question more seriously and seeks a positive inheritance of religion. He was right to point out the significance of Feuerbach in this respect, and his application of an historicised anthropology to Feuerbach's critique of religion can claim to be a legitimate development of Marxist religious criticism. Marx discerned the social roots of religious alienation, and was also aware that religion could function as protest. However, it took Bloch to fully discover the rich potential that lay within religion, which no doubt with eyes fixed more on Victorian Christianity than Thomas M nzer, only barely glimpsed.

Whether messianism and utopianism requires atheism, as Bloch contends, is questionable. He speaks as though God and man were of one and the same essence, and therefore the existence of God is necessarily a threat to human freedom. However, in the Christian tradition, the Godhead is understood as possessing a totally different order of being, and from this particular ontological perspective, the sovereign and all-embracing purpose of God neither denies human freedom nor is ultimately frustrated by it.<sup>36</sup> Further, through giving an objective point of reference for human history, one which affirms the ultimate triumph of love, Christian theism provides a basis for utopian aspirations, and helps provide the hope and confidence for the courageous exercise of human freedom. Thus the social utopia of a classless society and human liberation can be understood in terms of a Christian philosophy of history and eschatology. Admittedly, Christian theology has tended to be extremely conservative socially from St. Paul onwards, and the Church as an institution in society has been anything but revolutionary. However, the emergence of recent political theology has heightened awareness of the subversive and socially radical current in Christianity, and highlighted its revolutionary potential. Bloch himself was very aware of the possibilities for co-operation and dialogue between

a renewed Christianity and Marxism:

When Christians are really concerned with the emancipation of those who labour and are heavy-laden, and when Marxists retain the depths of the Kingdom of Freedom as the real content of revolutionary consciousness on the road to becoming the substance, the alliance between revolution and Christianity founded in the Peasant Wars may live again—this time with success.<sup>37</sup>

### *Reflections*

As was said at the beginning of this article, although at first Bloch sought to add a utopian dimension to Marx, he later came to an awareness of the utopianism already present in Marx's work. Maynard Solomon has pointed out that utopian imagination was in fact central to Marx's anthropology and understanding of human labour. For Marx, the essential difference between man and animals was that man possesses an image in his mind of the objects he produces in reality. Thus Marx regarded a form of utopian anticipation as fundamental to man.<sup>38</sup> The existence of a utopian orientation in his thought is particularly evident in writings such as the *Paris Manuscripts*, the *Grundrisse* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

A utopian awareness of the final goal, and a conviction about the moral desirability of that goal, are clearly subversive of the present order, and crucial factors in motivating people in the direction of revolutionary consciousness and action. For revolution to succeed enough people must *believe* in it, and utopianism is essential to sustaining such a belief. When such a utopian consciousness becomes widespread, it becomes a material force and power in human history. Thus Bertell Ollman is surely right when he says that Marx's vision of the future is of vital importance for raising class consciousness, and that the inability to conceive of a humanly superior way of life has impeded the growth of such consciousness. Hence his insistence: 'Giving workers and indeed all oppressed classes a better notion of what their lives would be like under communism (something not to be gleaned from accounts of present-day Russia or China) is essential to the success of the socialist project.'<sup>39</sup> Negatively, the lack of a positive image of the socialist alternative has greatly inhibited socialist advance. The standard objection to socialism, that present socialist states are unattractive and oppressive, is a very forceful one indeed. However, when existing models of genuine socialism are not ready to hand, the value of utopian images, descriptions, etc., is even more evident.

Once the connection is made between utopianism and the infusing of revolutionary consciousness, a vast area of human inspiration, drives and energies is opened up, and the tyranny of the present becomes subject to revolutionary hope. To be sure, any socialist renewal of

interest in the future must not depart from Marx's basic method, since revolutionary hope which is not based on proper analysis will only lead to disillusionment. As a disciple of Hegel, Marx recognised that there was no place for abstract ideals divorced from the real movement of history. However, it is precisely here that the value of Bloch's contribution becomes clear, since he so very firmly situates his ideas within the context of historical materialism. The consequence of this is that the dangers which have hitherto accompanied utopian socialism are avoided, while the possibilities of utopianism for renewing Marxism are open to realisation. Thus, although some of Bloch's more esoteric speculations, and particularly his notion that matter is in a process of development, must be rejected, a more modest renewal of utopianism within the framework of historical materialism is an enterprise that needs to be seriously considered.

Bloch's tendency to equate utopianism with chiliasm, however, has definite weaknesses. The future of which socialism speaks does not simply appear from nowhere, but at the climax of a long historical process, and as the end-product of a period of intense revolutionary struggle. In the socialist vision of the future there is thus both continuity and discontinuity. Chiliasm, in contrast, places all the emphasis on radical discontinuity, and its more sudden, eruptive and ecstatic character, raising the question of whether there is not a fundamental antipathy between chiliasm and historical materialism. Mannheim sees it as having more of an affinity with radical anarchism.<sup>40</sup> Although Bloch does maintain that the utopian hopes of revolutionary chiliasm need to be rectified, he unfortunately pays too little attention to these basic differences.

But this is not all there is to say about Bloch's contribution. During the present century, as technological development has continued apace, the composition of the working classes has altered dramatically. The proletariat is no longer a single homogeneous group but has become far more stratified, with, notably, a large and growing number of white-collar workers and technicians. In advanced industrial societies there is also a far higher level of general educational attainment. In such conditions, if there is to be a choice other than the outmoded insurrectionary politics of the vanguard and the modest achievements of welfare capitalism, then there must be a rebirth of a Marxism than can effectively wage the socialist struggle in ideological and cultural domain. Second only perhaps to the work of Gramsci, Bloch's innovative development of the Marxist tradition, with its rediscovery of the historical power of utopianism, indicates the way forward to such a Marxism.

Finally, recognition of the significance of utopian aspirations for socialist transformation, along with the insistence on the utopian content of religion, indicates possibilities for dialogue between Marxist socialism

and Christian utopianism. At the practical level, the partial fusing of these two utopian projects could be extremely important, in terms of the alliance of social forces created.

Furthermore, such an alliance need not be a fudge, but could lead to a renewal of the potential of both socialism and Christianity. The problem, of course, with Bloch's meta-religion, from the Christian point of view is that Christianity is completely superseded and absorbed by a revitalised Marxism. For the Christian theologian this would be unacceptable since there are elements of Christianity that cannot be thus surrendered. The most obvious of these is the doctrine of God, but also there is Christianity's perspective on certain basic questions, such as the meaning of life, the problem of suffering, and the finality of death. Accordingly, however strong an alliance is forged, Christianity would always need to remain distinct from Marxism. Thus, in a future socialist culture of human freedom religion would continue an independent existence, providing answers to questions that Marxism in itself cannot answer. The only alternative would be if socialism itself were to undergo a complete transformation, and incorporate these elements of Christianity within itself, but this would involve a religious inheritance beyond that envisaged by Ernst Bloch.

- 1 For biographical information see W. Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p. 5ff; the translators' introduction in *The Principle of Hope* (hereinafter *PH*), trans. N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p. xixff; Jurgen Moltmann's introduction to E. Bloch, *Man on his Own* (anthology), trans. E.B. Ashton, New York, Herder, 1970, p. 19—29; J. Bentley, *Between Marx and Christ*, London, Verso, 1982, p. 79ff; D. Gross, 'Ernst Bloch: The Dialectics of Hope', in D. Howard and K. Klare, *The Unknown Dimension*, London/New York, Basic Books, 1972, p. 107ff; M. Lowy, 'Interview with E. Bloch', *New German Critique*, No. 9, 1976, p. 35—45.
- 2 See *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. J. T. Swann, New York, Herder, 1972, p. 268f.; also W. Hudson, op. cit., p. 56.
- 3 E. Bloch, *On Karl Marx* (anthology), trans. J. Maxwell, New York, Herder, 1971 pp. 21, 23 (*PH*, 1358f.).
- 4 See *ibid*, p. 22f. (*PH*, 1358f.)
- 5 *ibid*, p. 18—20 (*PH*, 1355—7).
- 6 *ibid*, p. 88 (*PH*, 274).
- 7 *ibid*, p. 21 (*PH*, 1358).
- 8 *ibid*, p. 76f. (*PH*, 264f.).
- 9 *ibid*, p. 36 (*PH*, 1370).
- 10 See *ibid*, p. 16—45, esp. p. 44f. (*PH*, 1354ff., esp. 1375f.), and *ibid*, p. 172. Also *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 270ff; *A Philosophy of the Future*, trans. J. Cumming, New York, Herder, 1970, p. 96 and p. 138; W. Hudson, op. cit, p. 99ff. and p. 202ff; D. Gross, op cit, p. 121ff.
- 11 See *On Karl Marx*, p. 30ff (*PH*, 1365ff); *PH*, p. 205ff.; and *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 268f.
- 12 *On Karl Marx*, p. 171f.
- 13 See *ibid*, p. 139. Also p. 39ff (*PH*, 1371ff).
- 14 *ibid*, p. 33 (*PH*, 1367).
- 15 *Man On His Own*, p. 118 (*PH*, 496).
- 16 *ibid*, p. 119 (*PH*, 497).
- 17 *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 100.
- 18 *ibid*, p. 103.

- 19 *Man On His Own*, p. 126 (PH, 502f.).  
20 *ibid*, p. 131 (PH, 507).  
21 *ibid*, p. 130 (PH, 506).  
22 *ibid*, p. 133f. (PH, 509).  
23 *ibid*, p. 135 (PH, 510).  
24 *ibid*, p. 137 (PH, 512).  
25 *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 52.  
26 *ibid*, p. 51ff.  
27 *ibid*, p. 38ff. 42ff.  
28 On setting utopian hopes 'on their feet' see *On Karl Marx*, p. 23ff (PH, 1359ff), and the discussion by W. Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 55, 63. Regarding the importance of vital and elemental drives, etc. see K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, London, Routledge, 1936 (1979), p. 190ff., and P. Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, trans by F. Sherman, New York, Harper, 1977, p. 132—7.  
29 *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 58—63.  
30 *ibid*, p. 210. Also see *Man On His Own*, p. 209ff. (PH, 1284ff.), and W. Hudson, *op cit.*, p. 185.  
31 *Man On His Own*, p. 219ff. (PH, 1293ff.).  
32 *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 239.  
33 *ibid*, p. 69. See also *ibid*, p. 9 and *Man On His Own*, p. 147ff. (PH, 1189ff).  
34 *Man On His Own*, p. 169/70 (PH, 1233/4). For the term 'meta-religion' see p. 163, 213 (PH, 1201, 1288).  
35 *ibid*, p. 223 (PH, 1296).  
36 See P. Tillich's discussion of the 'polarity of freedom and destiny' in his *Systematic Theology*, London, SCM, 1978, Vol 1, p. 182—6; J. Moltmann in *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, New York, Scribners, 1969, p. 63ff.  
37 *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 272.  
38 M. Solomon, 'Marx and Bloch: Reflections on Utopia and Art', *Telos*, Vol 13. p. 68—85 (p. 75—7).  
39 B. Ollman, 'Marx's Vision of Communism: A Reconstruction', *Critique*, No. 8, Summer 1977, 4—41 (p. 9).  
40 Karl Mannheim, *op. cit.*, p. 215ff.

---

## CORRECTIONS

In Michael Dummett's 'What Chance for Ecumenism?'  
(December 1988):

- p. 538, 1.4 from the bottom: 'certainties' should read 'uncertainties';
  - p. 542, 1.6: after 'came' add 'to be formulated'.
-