

Review

The Seeds of communism in christianity: Reality and limitations

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The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness.» Karl Marx. Communism, in its chauvinistic fervor, often takes the form of a religious section not to say an orthodoxy in its own right. Paradoxically enough, in communism, the world is not there save as a mass of materials and it is for this reason in particular that it offers no room for deity at once. All deities, in its philosophy are considered as a means for the rulers to manipulate the masses. In view of its radical annihilation of the principle of hierarchy known to monotheistic religions, communism has been set to rival with all religions at once and with Christianity in particular, due to the social and cultural environment where they were both vying for popularity: namely the West. From a communist point of view, man is held as the sole responsible for his own deeds and it is only by reference to those deeds that he shall go « up » or « down » in the eyes of his immediate social surrounding. And yet, unconsciously, communism seems to have been perpetrating a lie that has grown into something self-induced.

Key words: Christianity, communism, communists and humanism and Man.

INTRODUCTION

Under communism, man is no master over his own destiny; instead, he is enthralled by the chimera of «society»: that the latter is blessing and that man can thrive only within the stifling agglomerations of fellow partisans to the communist state. In the light of this, my line of thought starts off by an attempt to qualify the relationship between communism and Christianity. Communism has been long struggling to keep us under the illusion that man is afforded full and absolute autonomy for his deeds for the mere idea that there is no deity at the back of its references and more autonomy, indeed, once unchained from class struggle: a claim which hardly escapes criticism.

From a psychological point of view, and in Freud's reading, this is an instance of displacement. It can be read consequently as an outlet for the pent-up resentments of those communist « Individuals » against their personal failures or simply against their bitter incapacity to adjust to or to fit in the mould of capitalism. What they are antagonizing is precisely the notion of competition. They are aspiring to institutionalize a moneyless, classless state whereby there should be no one «individual» to be set as a model to follow. There will be only the «State»: that abstract ghoul which literally drains the riches of people to stand out as a contrived representation of the well-being of the community. Communism

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in the light of this and from a Freudian perspective reveals itself as a *defence mechanism* according to which the ills of the self are all dumped onto an outsider: stigmatized as the bearer of our own imperfections. This outsider for the communists is the non-communist.

Paradoxically enough, and more alarmingly, the subject of the projection can be pointed as the fellow Communists themselves who have to bear on their shoulders all the incapacities of people from their own party.

So, if the communists do not feel they are likely to be in assonance with the capitalists, then, they have to unconsciously indict every single member of their party and consequently turn away from them and hail the State as their god. Those latent motivations can yet be read in the followers of Christ who chose to renounce all property and devote their beings to worship. Again, a disdain for individuality in the Christian faith itself can be the unacknowledged reference to that fervent devotion and sacrificial inclination either of the Lord or of his disciples.

*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe*¹

Still, this very same issue of projection can be the guiding star in our reading of the notion of monotheistic religion in the several manifestations it has taken throughout history.

Communism was so impulsive and radical a movement that its leaders felt it vital for them to sweep away a wide array of long-praised certainties in order to find a locus for their own dogmas within the minds of people. And yet, the basic tare for communism was that it unconsciously structured itself as the antithesis of Christianity in a number of its aspects.

Christianity was built on an idealistic form of Humanism. The latter could be traced back to the Platonic view of the world as a great chain of being: one in which every single creature is assigned a place in the universe, whereby man was favored as the very magnetic centre of that paradigm. In this philosophy adopted by Christianity, man's existence is not subject to economic conjectures nor to the workings of class struggle. Its mechanism rather follows the will of a God, full of grace and mercy who guarantees the salvation of his men. However, even the Christian dogma itself has a range of limitations to its vociferous claim for the Chain of Being as a fixed and unaltered temple for the universe.

Man has been endowed with a will and made to the image of God, which bestows upon him the quality of a rational being who is able to shift sites within the paradigm of the Holy chain of being by virtue of his mind. Still, man is held responsible, again, about his destiny for

it is up to him that he shall dwell in heaven or in hell. We notice that two strong ideas –antagonistic in nature– make opposite poles for Christianity: an instance of self-contradiction or duplicity in both logic and discourse inherent to this monotheistic religions along with others.

Coming now to the problem of communism, we notice that it has been struggling to be what Christianity was not (or did not allow, in its basic teachings). Communism has gone in its principles for the other extreme of the humanistic teachings of Christianity. Communism arose as the very negative edge in the image of man made for him by Christ. It adopts an ideology which abides by no ethical absolutes and nullifies any glory achieved for or by man before the moment he was proclaimed a communist. All highness or transcendent image allotted to man by Christianity was at once erased to be taken over by party allegiance. Man, was left as little more than a puppet in the hands of his governor, or even less. Any « thing » -be it religious, political, or even related to personal thinking of the individual- that is not concerned with the amassing of materials and the crippling social and economic conditions was hailed by Marxists as « *the opium of the people* ». However, we are bound to see communism as an opium, too, for a number of reasons.

Communism chose for itself the antithesis of the portrait of the ideal man depicted by Christianity, thus endowing man with a character wholly in service of the State. The latter is the surrogate figure of the patriarchal, omnipresent god of Christianity; however, it pays no heed to whether his subjects are made to his own image or not. This god-like figure for the communists: the state, has run miles away from the idea of ethical absolutes so much so that it holds faith in only « *the end justifies the means* »: the Faustian principle that has long stood as the curse awaiting any disobedient slave of God. *Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother*; these were among the commandments that established the ideological underpinnings of Christianity. For communism, however, every agreed-upon ethical absolute can be reconsidered if it is expedient to do so (including the commonsensical discrepancy between good and evil in its most blatant manifestations). A quick glance at the words of Lenin can only hold a true mirror to the figure of the overreacher drawn by the tacticians of the communist party for their subjects:

« *We must display determination, endurance, firmness and unanimity. We must stop at nothing. Everybody and everything must be used to save the rule of the workers and peasants, to save communism* »².

Set in contrast to this overriding, Faustian tone is the notion of love which is the corner-stone of the Christian

¹ Providence 28:26.

² (Speech to Third All-Russia Congress of Textile Workers (1920)

faith. The law of love is established as the engine and the *raison d'être* for all human action so much so that he can forgive those who do him wrong. For communist thinking, the socio-economic surroundings of the community (not the individual) vitally determine their social interactions with one another. No room is left for love or any other human feeling and the integrity of man's emotions is all directed towards the emergence of a classless society! In the meantime, allegiance to the state (no matter how transient the latter could be in its history) remains an end in itself. Man is divested of his individuality and turned into a trifle, a slave to the state. The latter is now deified and used in turn as a powerful means to subjugate the masses but under the cloak of legitimacy: something which at first glance, does set it apart from religious faith. However, they both remain fundamentally and principally identical. Their aim is one: manipulation.

Both communism and Christianity preached about social justice and envisioned a world ruled by absolute equality among people regardless of their skin color, class and caste, etc. Strangely enough, the first accounts about man's vital need to live in a communist society are already available in the text of Christianity. In his teachings, Jesus of Nazareth voiced an outright – almost absurd- indictment of the idea of property:

« And Jesus looked round about, and saith upon his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! (...) It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God » (Matthew X 17-25)

DISCUSSION

So, we notice, that in his perpetual imprecation of property, Jesus was articulating an unabashed call for people to divorce all their materialistic needs and devote themselves to an austere worship of the Almighty (the latter, for the Trinitarians, was Jesus himself). The same is applicable to the communists who go for the obfuscation of the individual to the benefit of the state (the latter being a temporary representation of the idea of classless society). Having social justice as the main concern in both philosophies is what has in fact erased the parameters of the self, thus announcing imminent caesurae in both of them.

Starting from the policies established in primitive societies for the sake of preserving cultural perpetuity, René Girard argues that human beings are forever inhabited by a mimetic desire which inevitably generates competition and rivalry. And for cultural order to be kept away from those vicissitudes of the human psyche, there has to be a certain mechanism of purgation that would direct the accretion of human ills (or collective violence) in a given society against one individual: the scapegoat,

who would bear them out and guarantee the survival and concord of the remaining majority. This can also be read as a practice related to the Darwinian hypothesis about the survival of the fittest. Yet the process of elimination occurs, not because of natural selection, but in view of the mimetic desire for possession and therefore of the vital propensity for humans to contend for superiority by competing over ownership.

Let us not forget that Christianity was inaugurated in its early stages by a sacrificial act. It is the crucifixion of Jesus who bore upon his shoulders all the sins of humanity and was lifted up high to stand somewhere as the symbolic Savior of his followers. This happened, because the Jews were so unready to take leave of their religious traditions and were fiercely vying with the Christians over who was holding the true faith. Communism, in its most primitive stages was an expedient measure to limit external intrusion in personal property. Parts of the land, therefore, had to be vitally submitted (or sacrificed) in return for the service of watching the whole field from strangers.

We speak therefore, of the notion of social Darwinism whereby, according to social circumstances, the human beings struggle for existence within a particular socio-economic surrounding. Communism, in this respect, was so unpractical a regime that its end was inevitable. In his *Social Origins*, Lang and Atkinson states that there was nothing more primitive about man than the notion of proprietorship and that what we know as « primitive communism » came simply as a moderation of instincts for the sake of driving away some other tribes out of the immediate social environment of small communities (Lang and Atkinson 2010). To extrapolate, we can say that « communism » came as nothing more than an expedient to survival. If I would let you share my land, it is for the simple reason that you belong to my tribe and likewise, we would not be destroyed by intruders.

This implies the fact that there was nothing historical about communism. It came as little more than a strategy of survival or let us say, a condescension to communal life as a shield from death. The latter (death, that is) was equated in this context with the loss of property. This is a proof that communism, in its primitive versions, included no abandoning of property for the sake of a social group. On the contrary, it came as an investment in communal life in order to maintain property of the means of production. And, again, it leads us to discover one possible truth about communism: that it emerged in its 19th-century version as a deformation of the idea of ownership and as actually a policy of killing individuality. It took the form of blind subjugation to a unanimously agreed-upon individual known as the holder of truth: This truth being the promise of prosperity and equality among the people. In his book, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Anthony Giddens speaks of the psychology of authority as follows:

Some individuals find it psychologically difficult or impossible to accept the existence of diverse, mutually conflicting authorities. They find that the freedom to choose is a burden and they seek solace in more overarching systems of authority. A predilection for dogmatic authoritarianism is the pathological tendency at this pole. A person in this situation is not necessarily a traditionalist, but essentially gives up faculties of critical judgment in exchange for the convictions supplied by an authority whose rules and provisions cover most aspects of his life.³

Still on the same page, Giddens (1991), points to the stunning reality that similar forms of subjugation are actually different from and more blinding than religious faith itself:

(...) for faith almost by definition rests on trust. Taking refuge in a dominant authority, however, is essentially an act of submission. The individual, as it were, no longer needs to engage in the problematic gamble⁴ which all trust relations presume. Instead, he or she identifies with a dominant authority on the basis of projection. The psychology of leadership plays an important role here. Submission to authority normally takes the form of a slavish adherence to an authority figure, taken to be all-knowing⁵.

We notice that underpinning the dogma of both Christianity and communism, is the idea of sacrifice. Both philosophies praise one exterior entity to the detriment of the self. The target being either God or the State, the individual is seen as a victim or -in Girardian terms- as a scapegoat. In this way, a gap is being set between the self and its community and only two alternatives avail themselves to him: either to follow or to resist.

The paradox (Personally, I would call it « historical incongruency ») inherent to communism is that it preaches what it is not: a downfall actually common to any dogma that targets the consciousness of the people. If Marx's *Manifesto* (1848) saw (or let me say « wished ») communism to be a historical necessity and that the State was a temporary representation of class oppression, it also saw no need for the State by the mere expedient of « ridding » society of its classes. However, and still within history itself, we come to find out that those theories were nothing more than utopian speculations or mere projections of an oppressed and heinous self against the idea of competition. The communists –along with the rest of the world- were soon up to a rude awakening that such theory has no room in real life. The State never « withered away »; on the contrary, under

Lenin and Stalin, it became a far more totalitarian entity than it had ever been under the Tsars themselves.

An utterance like « *from each according to his abilities to each according to his needs* » really leaves me unimpressed for the mere fact that human history allows no similar concession to the detriment of the principle of social Darwinism that had shaped human « history » since ever. Still in this same streak, human history has held strong testimony to the impossibility of survival for any Utopian speculations about the future. The latter is not what we wish as much as it is what we actually make of it. Besides, what would life look like if we were all destined to live in a « paradise » where everything avails itself to numb hands and passive minds? What would be then the use of the human consciousness? And how shall we ever evolve? What reveals itself as the inevitable outcome of history is the endless birth and rebirth of over-reachers: those idiosyncratic figures (whom not many people would like) and who conceive of their own *Utopia* as a matter of sheer individuality. Hence the tribute perpetually and unconsciously given by them to the human mind: something which takes us back to the ancient portrayal of man as a God-like figure and which remains forever threatened by the danger presented (by either Christians or Communists) to the notion of property.

The latter of course, can simply be mitigated (not erased at once) for we live in a world of social interaction: that is, of combative human instincts. A counterbalance to the principle of absolute and unruly property would be that of internationalism because the nations' economic interests will be hailed as of far more importance than national chauvinism, party allegiance This liberal theory with all its free-trade philosophy is directed to the boon of humanity despite all difference: a dynamics of a modern Utopia set in opposition to what we encounter, for example, in Thomas More's text:

There are 54 cities in the island, all large and well-built: the manners, customs, and laws of which are the same, and they are all contrived as near in the same manner as the ground on which they stand will allow.

Still, Marx's theory that men's minds are restrained by their economic necessities has to be substantially questioned. Actually, there is more into the human mind than sheer material needs: there is consciousness which equips it with the capacity to look beyond what purports to be a *system* of any sort. It is true that communism and Christianity were long-lived not only as dogmas but also as matter for controversy (Marx 2011). They were part of a written tradition: of a historical recording of the minds of some men who craved to gain faith in them and save them from the abyss of oblivion. This is fairly legitimate for all humans of thought, in other words for any human who fears to have his ideas ignored or forgotten.

However, what matters on the other end of the spectrum, is that we should be critical towards all heritage we

³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991. P. 196.

⁴ I think he is referring here to Pascal's Wager.

were made to read. Nothing is firmly set within the confinements of the historical component, as claimed by Marx in his *Communist Manifesto*; there is much more than history in a system of any sort.

“The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism. All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.”

The problem with both Christianity and communism is that they respectively view human life as unmanageable unless under the gratifying presence of an all-knowing deity (be it Christ or the State). From the point of view of deconstruction, both should be read with a distance. The latter is drawn by our critical reading of what is called metaphysics of presence. We are actually made to hold faith in the presence of an entity capable of saving us even though it may often make us endure hardships and we are bound, nevertheless, to humbly accept things as they come (or as they are destined to befall us). In regard of this, I am reading “the metaphysics of presence” as an instance of misguidance that has been unconsciously fossilized in people’s minds. Its effect finds expression in different forms of intellectual slavery in Christianity as in communism. People have been numbed by the spell of those opiums to the extent of developing a sense of unrealistic contentment (often verging on stupor) with the status quo in spite of all suffering:

That’s why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.
COR 12:9-10

CONCLUSION

What they have contrived as « presence » is given prominence over what people had been blinded to see. And any exterior ideas are deemed as violation of what « nature » (whether in the sense of providence or determinism) had hitherto made perfect. Their indictment of the human mind was perniciously translated through their discourse of shared fate, determinism, sacrifice and promise ... while it all bore within itself a cruel inclination to minimize individuality and humanism.

One truth is that capitalism has gained edge since ever because it has emerged in history as a global phenomenon (Wallerstein 1974). Even in countries like China,

we do speak of the sprouts of commodity economy since the 17th century. Those sprouts were simply made to resprout in the middle of the 18th century in spite of the Manshu conquest. Capitalism was not firmly acknowledged in the history of China as a system per se. However, some indexes in history prove that certain groups of people even within the communist party itself (namely those affiliated with the Guomindang and the Trotskyist factions) were dead against the primacy given by the communist party to the land revolution in China (Dirlik 1989).

Failed models of communism through history like Cuba or Paraguay equally testify to the fact that a similar social system was no longer tenable nor feasible worldwide. It was made practically impossible: its bête noire being human competition!

This deduction is also based on my reading of *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (2002), who draws hilarious portrayals of Christians who preach what they are not. The Father of English literature followed the lead of the Wycliffites but his tool was literary rather than theological (or theoretical). Both Wycliff and Chaucer antagonized the wealth of the Catholic church and pointed with an incriminating index to the hypocrisy inherent to that religious sect. In his « General Prologue », Chaucer draws uproarious caricatures of a monk who relishes in riding and hunting and of the friar who pays more heed to taverns and whores than to the leprous or the needy

*He Knew wel the taverns in every town
And every ostiller or gay tapstere
Bet than a lazer or a beggere*

The safest of all bets remains to be made on the human consciousness for it is by virtue of his capacity for distancing himself from what he is given, that the individual manages to reconsider any historically documented text and is, thus, moved to put any form of logocentrism into question. Any allegedly fixed point, any text which purports to be an origin for thought shall be deconstructed. Then (and only then) a plethora of paths shall open up in front of the human drive to seek out new truths and tease out new meanings which, in turn, have but a momentary stay against emerging ones.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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