



The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

Lausanne Occasional Paper 12 Christian Witness to Marxists

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Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization

Mini-Consultation on Reaching Marxists

held in Pattaya, Thailand from 16-27 June 1980

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Prefatory Note

This report, Christian Witness to Marxists, is one of a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) emerging from the historic Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980. The report was drafted by members of the "Mini-Consultation on Reaching Marxists" under the chairmanship of Rev. R. Philip Le Feuvre.

The major part of this report went through a draft and a revised draft, which involved all members of the mini-consultation. It was also submitted to a wider "sub-plenary" group for comment, but the responsibility for the final text rests with the mini-consultation and its chairman.

The report is released with the prayer and hope that it will stimulate the church and individual members in reaching this large segment of the population.

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Contents

Introduction

Section I

1. Basic Marxist Characteristics

- A. Variation
- B. Preferring Action to Speculation
- C. Certain More Personal Characteristics
- D. Attitude to Christianity

2. Why We Have Failed

- A. Ideological Reasons
- B. Semantic Reasons
- C. Practical Reasons

3. Why We Have Succeeded

- A. Love
- B. Life Consistent With the Gospel
- C. Christian Witness Not Confused With Political Postures
- C. Sound Reason
- E. Readiness to Confess Failure

4. Evangelistic Strategy

- A. Love
- B. The Biblical Critique
- C. Consistency With the Gospel
- D. Sound and Solid Reasons
- E. Proclamation

Section II

1. A Survey of Christian Strategies in Three Areas

- A. Marxism in Western Countries
- B. Reaching Marxists in Eastern Europe
- C. Christian Strategy in Third World

Appendix A "Adaptability in Meeting the Situation"

Appendix B "A Testimony of a Communist student leader in a Latin American University"

Appendix C "Bibliography"

Introduction

Marxism today is not monolithic. First, there is the post-revolutionary Marxism of the Eastern European bloc of nations, including the Soviet Union. Secondly, there is the potentially revolutionary situation of the Third World of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. And, thirdly, there is the theoretical and parliamentary Marxism such as that which we find in the Western nations of Europe and America, and in Australia, Japan, and India. Because of that diversity, the church encounters the Marxist world of the 1980s in very different situations. It is to these groups that we address our study and for which we define our evangelistic

strategy.

Since Marxism has never been monolithic across the world, the church cannot approach every Marxist with only one strategy of evangelism. We need to consider the three areas of varied commitment to Marxism in greater detail.

Eastern Europe is 35 years beyond the Marxist take-over of its lands, and Russia is over 60 years beyond its revolution. The church can no longer simply react to given situations. It must take the initiative to be a reconciler and builder of a society in which the gospel will find increasing freedom of expression. We recognise that this is no easy task. Our evangelistic mandate must be directed toward the second and third generations of those raised in a totally Marxist-dominated educational system. That system has imposed a Marxist world-view on those Eastern European societies. Thus we seek by evangelism to reach the children of the revolution.

The church in Africa, Latin America, and Asia faces a very different situation in its environment for evangelism. It has to face and to define the church's role of evangelism within a potentially revolutionary context. It must take up issues such as violence, the support of dictatorship, revolution as an option, the cry of the oppressed peasants, etc. In that context, it is essential to define the social dimensions of the gospel which are inherent in the message of salvation.

In Western countries, Christians respond only to an academic and parliamentary form of Marxism. The church in America and Europe confronts the Marxist students and professors on the university campus, the trade unionist and industrial workers in the labour arena, and those involved directly in national politics.

In formulating a strategy of evangelism, we have chosen to examine four basic areas:

- Marxist characteristics
- Why we have failed
- Why we have succeeded
- Evangelistic strategy

We will seek, therefore, to show how the principles outlined apply to the following three situations: pre-revolutionary Third World societies, post-revolutionary societies, Western societies. It is necessary also to point out that we have been unable to include certain countries in our consultation. Mainland China has been dealt with by another group. Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, Mongolia and Communist countries of Southeast Asia were not represented, and we were not able to get any preconsultation response from these areas.

What is a Marxist? We adopt the position that anyone who calls himself a Marxist is a Marxist, for the following reasons:

First, we do not wish to pigeonhole people—we affirm the right of others to define themselves rather than to be defined. Stereotyped pigeonholing does not allow people to be human.

Secondly, we seem to encounter as many varieties of Marxism as there are Marxists; and we do not wish, therefore, to define in advance what variety people adhere to in order to qualify as Marxist.

Thirdly, the term Marxist is for some a term of condemnation. We do not wish to use it in that way.

Section I

1. Basic Marxist Characteristics

A. Variation

There is an impression among non-Marxists that Marxism is a rigidly monolithic doctrine. At least in practice, but also in theory, this is simply not true. There is tremendous variation of emphasis in both the interpretation and practice of Marxism—which means that we must know the particular type of Marxists we are seeking to reach with the gospel. There are ideological variations, but there are also *variations of commitment*. A Latin American group distinguished between (i) those with a sense of justice who believe that Marx is right; (ii) those who are working actively in Marxist organizations; and (iii) those who are ideologically educated, committed, and militant Marxists. The same group also noted that, while in the West Marxism is associated with secularization, in the Third World it is far more associated with revolution and a change in the economic and political order.

B. Preferring Action to Speculation

Marxists take seriously Marx's famous dictum about changing the world and not merely talking about it. This means that Marxists are committed, in a practical sense, to the effective establishment of materialistic, scientific socialism—a dedication to practicality which, as one Czech source has discovered, leads Marxists to be open to persuasion when confronted by undisputed facts.

Believing, as they do, that the origin of evil is to be found in the economic sub-structure of society, Marxists are convinced that a just society can be created through the efforts of man in restructuring the economic order. By and large, they are aroused by a sense of indignation at the injustices and exploitation in present economic systems and consequently commit themselves to a dynamic and genuine attempt to meet the needs of the needy. Most people, especially young people, who call themselves Marxists have not been converted to Marxism by the intellectual claims of the philosophy, but have been attracted by a personal desire for political and social justice and have actively identified themselves with the poor and the oppressed. In doing so, they have been consistent in helping the poor to attain a better life and, at the same time, seeking to educate the poor in the reasons for their oppression.

Such action cannot be taken effectively by people acting as individuals or even from within mere aggregates of individuals. *Solidarity* (partiinost) is essential to effective action—a solidarity that manifests itself in a joint responsibility *to* authority, and *for* authority. Consequently, the Marxist must be seen within the context of this loyalty to the collective whole.

Although it was felt by some groups that the policy of "Socialism in One Country" had weakened the original Marxist emphasis on revolution in the West, groups working in the Third World were almost unanimous that revolution was still the aim of Marxist activity. To change the world, the economic sub-structure needed to be changed. And this could only be done by the overthrow, almost certainly violent, of the powerful political superstructure, thus securing leadership for the industrial and/or rural proletariat. This is how Marxists think, and this is the goal towards which they are actively working—at least in the Third World.

From their commitment to action in the achievement of a clearly defined goal, it will be easily understood that Marxists are earnest in their propaganda. An African group noted that, although dedicated Marxists were few in Africa, their influence was enormous. They are active in their recruitment, particularly of nationals, in Third World countries. To achieve what they consider to be the ends of justice and equity, they are prepared to use and exploit any agency on the principle that this end does justify every means. This is important in understanding the Marxist's attitude to the church. He may be contemptuous of Christianity, but if it can be used to fulfil his ideals and the aims of the party, he will not hesitate to use it.

C. Certain More Personal Characteristics

As was to be expected, these varied from place to place, but there did appear to be certain common factors which emerged again and again from groups in different parts of the world.

Marxists appear *to distrust outsiders* and outside ideas. This is probably the negative aspect springing from partiinost.

Perhaps it is this distrust which also makes them *argumentative*. This was widely commented on—two groups suggesting that very often argument was engaged in more for the sake of debate than for seeking truth. The fact that argument very seldom led to commitment of any sort among Marxists was something, which, it was suggested, ought to be noted by Christians in the work of evangelism.

In their active involvement with the material and socio-economic, Marxists appear to have *little theory of subjectivity*. Consequently, they may well be cast onto the rocks by their inability to deal with their own emotional and existential experiences of life. Over and over again, groups reminded us that *Marxists are*

peopleâ€”that is to say, that they have emotions, feelings and personal needs just like anybody else. They, too, have to face the challenge of personal and sexual relationships, of sickness and pain, of the high cost of living, of bereavement and death, including their own. In such areas, Marxism can leave them very vulnerable. Ultimately, to quote a Marxist diplomat, it has very little to say about any “kind of identification with solemnity.” And, like every man or woman, the Marxist is not without some groping towards that, hide it though he will.

D. Attitude to Christianity

The Marxist believes that Marxism offers a *life-view that is all-encompassing*. It is based on economic determinism that sees nothing beyond the material universe. It claims to be scientificâ€”and thus correctâ€”in its analysis of history, of economics, and of sociology. Marxists are totally *convinced of atheism*; and consequently much of their thinking is bound to be antithetical to Christianity. In fact, most Marxists *take little note of Christianity at all* (a very humbling discovery for those Christians seeking to make contact with Marxists), regarding *all religion as irrelevant, superstitious, unscientific, and misrepresentation of reality*. In Marxist countries, education dominated by the Marxist analysis of history and religion has placed Christian evangelism at a severe disadvantage, as it is inevitable that all minds, even those not committed to Marxism, are bound to be heavily influenced by a dialectical and materialistic point-of-view. It was primarily in this area that certain groups felt constrained to describe Marxism as demonic and satanic.

Basically, Marxists regard the church as, at best, *irrelevant*, and, at worst, an *economically and politically oppressive institution*. It is seen as a body that has consistently set itself up in opposition to Marxist thinking and action, and consequently is an obstacle to the establishment of both justice and peace, even if it is not aware of that fact. Thus, while Marxists are prepared to use the church to achieve their own ends if this is desirable, they are very resistant to any approaches by the church. This can have both positive and negative consequences. Positively, it means that Christians can get along beside Marxists on certain issues where there is a clear affinity, by “allowing” them to draw the Christians into some sort of identifiable solidarity and commitment to specific, concrete action. Negatively, those Christians need to make sure that they know something of the dynamics of the interaction.

The majority of groups made the point that, whatever Marxists say about Christianity, most of them *have only the haziest idea about what Christianity is all about* and what the Bible teaches. This was expressed in various ways: that Marxists have been fed on stereotypes of Christianity; that their knowledge of Christianity is seldom first-hand, but is an inherited and distorted one; that Marxist leaders and teachers deliberately sell a parody of Christianity. In a word, few Marxists really know what true Christianity is or what Jesus taughtâ€”nor do they really care! Religion is false, and, while Christians may be very concerned with Marxists and their thinking, it would be a mistake for them to think that this interest is reciprocated. We end this section with an earlier observationâ€”by and large, Marxists have got better things to do than to be in the least interested in Christianity or the church.

2. Why We Have Failed

A. Ideological Reasons

We have failed to take seriously how powerful is the Marxist training in the analysis of history and religion; how strongly the theory of dialectical materialism is held; and consequently how completely contradictory and antithetical the Marxist world-view is in comparison with that of the Christian.

We have failed to take seriously Marx's critique of religion, and are consequently still holding some so-called “Christian” views which are culturally, rather than biblically, based. Where this is the case, it is very probable that Marx's views will be more true to the facts than ours. Certainly it is true that culture can very easily make religion the handmaid of its own economic interestsâ€”and has often done so! Where this is the case, the charge of hypocritical inconsistency very often sticks. We have failed to take seriously the Marxist critique of the Christian church which maintains the church is outlived and irrelevant; it has proved reactionary in its inability and unwillingness to come to grips with the harsh realities of life in the world today and to see that radical changes are needed in the economic structures of society; it has fostered a bourgeois and middle class religion, discouraging the growth of the class consciousness among the workers and peasants; it has set itself up against Marxists and their attempts to create a more just society, and instead has peddled superstition and a false representation of reality; it has not achieved unity for men and women, but has been too often divided by national, racial, and economic allegiances.

As a result of this perceived failure, Marxists are contemptuous of Christianity and reject approaches. Comment was made by groups monitoring the situation in Marxist countries that the educational backwardness of many Christians, who are denied access to higher education as a result of their faith has compounded that contempt. (East European participants noted several ways in which church structures hindered evangelism in East Europe. These will be found in the East European section.)

B. Semantic Reasons

We have failed to take seriously the fact that, where a philosophy and world-view different radically from that of the Christian are held, *methods of expression, terminology, and the content of vocabulary are bound to differ*. As a result, Christians are often guilty of talking to Marxists in a language that they do not understand or, worse still, that they misunderstand. For instance, whereas, “sin” should mean to the Christian the full scope of man's rebellion against God, the Marxists' concept of the Christian use of the word is that it covers only private and individual moral aberrations. This merely increases the possibility of the dissemination of a distorted view of Christianity.

C. Practical Reasons

These follow largely from the ideological reasons.

We have failed to take seriously the role of the church, in history and today, as *a practical upholder of the political, economic, and social status quo*. The church has too often identified itself with authoritarian attitudes and with the ruling classes. Hence, it has allowed itself to be used as an agent of oppression and imperialism, and still today, in many places, is quite prepared to support institutionalized, “legal” violence to keep the oppressed and lower classes in submissionâ€”all in the name of “law and order.” In a word, the church has compromised itselfâ€”in places, is still doing soâ€”in the eyes of Marxists, and the reason it appears to have done so has been its fear of losing influence and privilege in society. Its instinct for self-survival appears in places to take precedence over the gospel of the cross that it proclaims. And this becomes particularly noxious to Marxists, with their economic sensitivities, when this resistance is seen to be in defence of property.

We have failed to take seriously the call *to preach the gospel to the poor*, and to make it the *full gospel, touching the material as well as the spiritual aspects of life*. This was a factor mentioned by virtually every groupâ€”that the church has a culpable record of failure to identify with the social concerns of the poor and distressed, or to establish any solidarity of interest, love or action with those who suffer under injustice, exploitation, or selfishness. Indeed, such solidarity in action has been actively discouraged by large sections of the church, including missionary boards operating from First World countries. Bad working conditions, low wages, poor housing, discrimination, unemployment, exclusion from decision-making, have very often received nothing other than the most scant attention from the churches, who have felt thatâ€”however legitimateâ€”the political, economic and social aspirations of people, especially oppressed people, were not within the proper scope of their attentions. To the Marxist, these are the essential issues. And he has nothing but contempt for a church that seeks to ease the pain merely with charitable hand-outs, but is not prepared to stand up and challenge the structures in society that cause the pain.

Part of the complexity of this central issue is the present failure of Christians to be agreed as to whether social action is part of the actual gospel proclamation. This needs to be intensely investigated.

Two groups, one in Asia and one in Europe, made a further observation. Not only has failure to identify with the poor and the oppressed weakened the appeal of the gospel in the eyes of Marxists, but it has also lost certain church members to Marxism. Politically-conscious Christians, with a tender conscience towards the suffering of the poor, have found themselves utterly frustrated by the inactivity and, sometimes, positive opposition of the church and have been forced to conclude that Marx's critique was right after all. In the end, they so identify with the Marxists, who seem to be the only people doing a just job, that they become unidentifiable as Christians.

3. Why We Have Succeeded

The evidence for success in reaching Marxists with the gospel was extremely thin in the findings of every group, and the reasons for what success has been expressed here has been drawn more from inference than from direct statement. It will be seen that the reasons relate more to attitude than to direct evangelism or direct confrontation over ideological or political issues.

A. Love

The imperative necessity for the removal of hatred or suspicion was emphasised frequently. This is an absolute block to the gospelâ€”as is also the "they are Marxists; they are terrorists; they, therefore, do not deserve to hear the gospel" attitude. The theological heresy involved in such a statement does not seem to be as clear to some people as it ought to be! The call was for love, respect, kindness and tolerance in all dealings with Marxists, with eloquent testimony to the evangelistic effectiveness of Christians who had been in contact with Marxists over fairly lengthy periods of time, often in activists involvements.

B. Life Consistent With the Gospel

Testimony from converted Marxists who had been involved with Christians before their conversion pointed to the exposure to the gospel resulting from lives lived consistently with it as the main factor in their conversion. This was particularly true amongst students; and, in Africa, amongst young freedom-fighters. Comment was made on the reluctance of Christians to engage in any sort of ideological confrontationâ€”evangelism took the form of Christian action, followed up by explanation.

C. Christian Witness Not Confused With Political Postures

It would appear that, in such situations, Christians did not seek to identify themselves with the West; nor did they, either before or after conversion, seek to alter the political orientation of Marxists.

D. Sound Reason

Although Christians did not engage in ideological confrontation, they were always characterised by sound reason in consultation, debate, or strategy. Areas in which Christian reason seemed to obtain the respect of Marxists were (i) the meaning and purpose of life, (ii) intimate, personal problems, and (iii) the issue of true freedom.

E. Readiness to Confess Failure

Marxists claim to have been impressed by the readiness of Christians to admit failure in themselves and in the institutionalized churchâ€”and to be remarkably unthreatened in doing so. This is not a posture natural to Marxism, where failure is very often regarded as culpable and discrediting. Those who have seen success in evangelism among Marxists all emphasise absolute dependence on the *Scriptures* and *ongoing prayer*; and a deep and expectant trust in the guidance, working, and power of the *Holy Spirit*.

4. Evangelistic Strategy

A. Love

"God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"â€”and that includes Marxists. Paul is the example of one who "becomes all things to all men that by all means he might save some"â€”and for us "all men" must include Marxists. Marxists are men and women created in the image of God and for whom Christ died. God loves the men and women who are Marxists, and so must we!

Furthermore, we cannot love them merely as a "category," nor can we love them merely in principle. Even those who would seek to work among them by classifying them a "homogenous unit" cannot escape the command to love them as people individually. This means that we must be ready to

- give them our full and loving attention in listening to them;
- wash their feet, to serve them practically;
- respect them for their genuineness and sincerity;
- show a sensitive concern for their personal needs;
- expunge all attitudes of prejudice and suspicion from ourselves;
- stop being judgmental.

This does not mean that love compromises on essential issues. That it cannot do. What it does mean is that there can be no antipathy toward those we are seeking to win for Christ, however much we may disagree with them.

Love, incidentally, also means ceasing to be judgmental of other Christians who are also seeking to win Marxists for the Lord, but who are doing it in a way which we do not totally favour.

But love is not something that can be practised in a vacuum. From the majority of groups there came a call to evangelicals to emerge from the security of their sub-cultures, and to be found where Marxists are to be found. This is the only place at which the act of loving can begin. Christian theory and practice must be seen dynamically beside that of the Marxists. There was a variety of opinion as to how this should shape out in practice. At its most conservative, it was suggested that Christians ought actively to be involved in political and trade union meetings at which it was known that Marxists would be present; at its most radical, some groups called for Christians to be abreast of Marxists in oppressive situations, to reflect together with them on joint action and to be unafraid to join the struggle actively beside them. In every situation, it was envisaged that Christians should be bold to assert justice and righteousness and to struggle for it unto eventual reconciliation.

Love and evangelistic common sense come together in our making sure that we have a thorough knowledge of Marxism, of the Marxist mind, and of the particular form of Marxism with which we are dealing. This was a unanimous conclusion from all groups. The interesting feature was the emphasis that it was given; that to seek to win Marxists for Christ without first taking seriously what they think and believe is an act of disrespect and un-love. We are to listen respectfully to what they have to say; we are to seek to understand sympathetically their value systems and way of life; we are to be unafraid to acknowledge what is good and worthy, and to probe and question what is doubtful and unworthy. We are also to ask questions pertinent to our task as witnesses of the Lord. How far does Marxist unbelief protect them from the impact of biblical revelation? Finally, we are to learn their language and to use it. Much classical Christian thought-form is unintelligible to Marxists and can lead to serious misrepresentation.

Love also insists that the cultural and national background of Marxists be taken seriously. Despite Marxist internationalism, there are areas in which national culture is valued highly, not least as an expression of the socialist way of life. Literature, art, music, and drama can all be enlisted usefully in pre-evangelismâ€”as can the distribution of spiritual classics, either in translation or, especially in countries where there has been strong Orthodox influence, in re-publication and distribution. Certain Latin American groups made an appeal for evangelical Christians to clarify their positions concerning culture and to be ready to evaluate socialism, not from prejudice, but from a biblical point of view.

Although much emphasis was laid on personal evangelism in reaching Marxists, the importance of doing so from *the context of a loving local Christian fellowship* was also stressed. Not only would this provide the necessary support needed by the Christian himself, but it would also provide a manifestation of Christian love and concern in the form of a solidarity easily understood and appreciated by the Marxist, especially when it is extended to the Marxist personally in the hour of his own need. When this solidarity is marred by racism, prejudice, or class interests, it can have little appeal to the Marxist.

B. The Biblical Critique

The place to begin for *repentance* is the Bible. We must respond not so much to the challenge that Marxists bring to the church, but to the voice of God in the Scripture. Our principle for deciding what the Bible means is sometimes determined by our world-view. For instance, some Christians decide that the meaning of "the poor" in Luke 4:18 only refers to all men as poor in spirit. But we cannot interpret the Bible in a vacuum. And while as a matter of principle we must begin with the Bible, as a matter of chronological starting point our interpretation will begin with our situation. For us, that situation is a situation of poverty and injustice.

We come to the Bible in this situation, and we find that there is a prophetic critique of religion. The prophets indicted idolatry, which replaced a just moral God

with Canaanite fertility deities, on the grounds that such false understanding of God lay at the root of injustice and exploitation in their society. Jesus attacked the Pharisees and Sadducees for neglecting justice and for robbing widows' houses. These were not only religious but also political leaders in their society. Today a prophetic voice exists in the church, coming mainly from Third World churches. They have not been given a full hearing, and we fear lest power elites in churches and organisations will isolate them. The whole church must hear them, for the goal of a prophetic voice is not merely to gain a hearing, but to gain the whole church's obedience to God.

In the Bible we recognise that God uses non-Christians to achieve his purposes for man, and could even be using Marxists in some situations. He used the Assyrians to judge, and Cyrus to deliver, and Jesus called on his followers for a righteousness that exceeded that of the Pharisees. Marxists may be used to judge an unjust society, to open the way for responses to God, and to open the church's eyes to God's concern for justice in his people and his world.

In the Bible we recognise that there are many dimensions to Christian witness to the Good News in addition to verbal proclamation. The church's worship, fellowship, proclamation, teaching, and service all have an evangelistic component.

In the Bible we see that the outcome of proclaiming the gospel is not always success. Failure, rejection, and suffering are valid parts of the church's experience to an obedient mission as the church of the cross. We should not, therefore, plan or evaluate our strategies by manageable goals of success.

In the Bible we see that God's promise of new life in his kingdom under his rule is a present reality, and not just a future hope. Any eschatology that hinders obedience to the whole counsel of God in proclamation and service is unbiblical. We suggest that an understanding of the kingdom of God as both the experience of the present reality of God's rule over all human relationships (between God and man, between man and man in society, and between man and his physical environment), and as the promised goal of God's redemptive activity when Jesus returns is a vital theological theme for communicating the Good News to Marxists. God intervenes to transform all man's relationships now (spiritual, personal, and social). He will finally intervene to bring a new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells, which far surpasses the Marxist hope. The certainty of this final intervention is one of the grounds for Christian involvement in society now, to demonstrate the redemption that God purposes for all human life. We need to develop a biblical model of the kingdom of God as both a present reality and a future hope, as calling for personal repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ, and as being expressed in the community of the King, the Body of Christ.

In order to change the image that the church communicates, and its alliance with an unjust status quo in some places, we call for attention to the prophetic voice; a study of the biblical teachings on justice; involvement in situations of poverty, especially among the rural and urban poor; and repentance that issues in genuine change of commitments and actions. At present many structures of the church only allow articulate middle class people to make their voices heard and take a part in decision making.

C. Consistency With the Gospel

It has already been stressed that what impresses the Marxist is "praxis" and not theory. In other words, what is required is a consistent, self-denying taking up of the cross in reality. And it must be done both personally by the individual Christian and also corporately by the church.

As far as individual consistency with the gospel is concerned, one group quoted the words of Samuel Escobar:

Only a real committed discipleship can match the attraction of Marxist commitment. Part of this discipleship is intellectual seriousness, but also necessary is the disciplined life, the attitude of service, the evangelistic zeal and the joy of a clear relationship with the Lord. A halfhearted, easy-going kind of Christianity is no answer to the challenge of Marxism.

Among other things, this means that Christians should seek to adopt a simpler life-style which is marked by sacrificial stewardship.

Corporate consistency is going to involve a total re-thinking and re-orientation of Christian theory and practice. Many of the church's structures are open to grave criticism from the point of view of Scripture, and appear to Marxists to be motivated more by a desire to preserve influence and prestige than to serve in the spirit of the cross. The church still bears too much of a triumphalist image. One group suggested that the church ought to initiate pilot plants of Christian alternatives in the church's witness to, and ministry in, social issues. In this way, the Holy Spirit might well indicate positive leads in the establishing of new, more biblical, and more effective evangelistic structures.

In the establishment of new structures in the evangelizing of Marxists, the church will have to give thought to those structures that will facilitate the taking of initiatives in areas of social concern. Christian love must be seen to out-do both government and Marxists in bringing about changes in social realities and in people. Marxists demand to see a high degree of Christian consistency, not merely in the gospel hall, but in those places where there is human need—and rightly so, for this is what the Bible itself says of Christ and demands of believers. As Christ identified with helpless and hopeless man in the incarnation, so must the church identify—and be seen to identify—with that section of humanity that is helpless and hopeless, poor and oppressed.

First, there should be an honest evaluation as to whether our Christianity is or is not truly committed to the sort of sacrificial service of humanity that Jesus requires, or whether it does not instead communicate itself as an institution more concerned with the status quo and its own structures.

Secondly, it must be recognised that to achieve that reconciliation and unity, of which the church so often speaks, it is necessary to do more than talk. Action is a prerequisite—action oriented towards justice and biblical righteousness. What intellectual issues there are, especially in the evangelization of Marxists, will follow from what has been seen to be meaningful action by Christians.

Thirdly, that action must be prayerfully thought out within the relevancies of the particular situation, whether it be speaking out against injustice, insisting forcefully on the application of just principles in productivity and opportunity, organising peaceful protest in the interest of labour and land reforms, or working in the midst of human suffering and oppression.

Fourthly, it must be accepted, with all that it implies in terms of sacrifice and service, that helping the poor and oppressed most often means altering the political, economic, and social structures of society. In this area, we cannot ignore the realities of Marxist analysis or the accepted findings of sociology. "Charity" may have been a sufficient response for the Christians of an earlier age, but our greater knowledge today of the dynamics of society makes that inadequate. Our love of God has to be with the mind as well as the heart. And that means that our service to men and women in need, in his name, has to be intelligent and in terms of the facts we now know. Those facts are that poverty and oppression are frequently caused by political, and especially economic, structures. And, if our attempts to identify with the poor in the name of Jesus are to be either intelligent or meaningful, then it is at this level that they must be directed. Anything else is patchwork and will rightly only win the contempt of the Marxist. It will demonstrate to him, not the winning and effective love of a Saviour, but the culpable naivete of those who are called by his name.

In all this, certain groups felt that it was right to insist, in witnessing to Marxists, that Christianity was not captive to any system. In adopting an orientation critical of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, or capitalism, it was not necessarily tying itself to a rigid socialism of any variety. The Christian's Master is Jesus Christ, and his service is freedom. That freedom can be compromised to no ideology. This, according to some groups, is a language well appreciated by Marxists.

Marxism is a philosophy and a programme which, as a whole, is fundamentally and inescapably atheistic. For this reason we find the concept of "Christian Marxist" a contradiction in terms. However, other socio-economic philosophies and programmes such as free-market capitalism can be also atheistic and unbiblical. When it is based on the premise that the free expression of human egotism and self-seeking will produce communal good, it is to elevate sin into a principle for life.

If we may use certain counselling theories or marketing strategies developed in the secular world to enable us to produce Christian strategy in a specific context, so we think we may critically accept aspects of Marxist or socialist or capitalist theory and practice which are compatible with the Scripture. Marxists are fallen men like the rest of us; they can hate, but they also can love. They are realists about society, but they are also visionaries and dreamers for a better society. They are creatures of the same God, affected by the same human condition of rebellion towards God, and with an awareness that the world is not as it should be. As fellowmen we have much in common with them.

Christian churches need to develop an independent initiative to incarnate their concerns for the poor and oppressed in interaction with the social reality around

them in the same way that Jesus interacted with society, and as the Christian community described in Acts 4:34 made resources available so that there were no needy among them. They crossed racial barriers and showed a special concern for the widows and the sick. Unless we develop concrete expressions of our faith in not only good works but also structures for a just society, we will be swallowed up by any who have a coherent, if unbiblical, programme. Incarnation is the biblical model we would seek to follow; the gospel cannot be proclaimed in a vacuum. The church must have a social and political reality and commitment, as the church which is both critical of all groups and clearly committed to serve and work with the poor so that they can attain the full humanity that is only possible in Jesus.

The goal of our participation is not primarily to win Marxists; it is to engage in the liberation of poor people from every expression of sin that imprisons their humanity. As we seek to work with poor people towards that goal, and share all aspects of the Good News of God's kingdom with them by word and deed, there may be occasions in some societies where we will seek the advice and assistance of Marxists just as Christians in other societies accept financial support and other help from men of good will. In some societies Christians have no choice but to co-operate with Marxist inspired bureaucracies and governments. In such societies, Christians will be critical and will never surrender their obligation to articulate the Good News that complete salvation and full humanity for man is only found in repentance and faith towards God and spiritual incorporation in the Body of Christ.

D. Sound and Solid Reasons

Much has been said and written recently about Christian-Marxist dialogue. On the question of dialogue, groups were very divided. From Eastern Europe, the scene of so much dialogue in the past, came a consensus that it achieved very little, and that most Marxists are frankly not interested. From student communities came the view that serious questions should be answered, but that this was not really the way to proceed. From Africa and Asia came an appeal for dialogue.

It was felt that evangelism was not an inconsistent motive, that dialogue is not negotiation and need not and should not involve surrender of doctrinal integrity.

But, whatever the view on dialogue, groups were insistent that Christians witnessing to Marxists could not afford to allow their rational functions to atrophy! They must know, and know thoroughly:

The Bible. They must be able to apply it cogently and accurately in the evaluation of political, economic, and social issues; and be able to articulate a relevant and theologically sound response. "To articulate" means to speak it out, and that must be done with humble confidence to Marxists, in the knowledge of homework done.

Church history. It is the record of the church's past that so often comes under Marxist fire. Where that fire is well-deserved, that must be acknowledged, but where it is caricature, the Christian must be able to expose it. We must not allow Marxists to write our church history for us. The time is long past for the development of a relevant Christian apologetic in the work of evangelizing Marxists. There has always been a prophetic voice within the church calling us to recognise God's concern for the poor and for our repentance. Such a voice has not always been within the evangelical tradition, and we recognise that we have found it hard sometimes to listen to it. But we cannot allow its existence to be denied.

Marxism. This has already been dealt with, but while the more accurate insights of the Marxists must be acknowledged and taken seriously in Christian praxis, the failures of Marxism must also be exposed. It is not politeness to be silent on these issues, and frank discussion of them with Marxists, if done within the context of a carefully nurtured respect, can be powerful and effective. Various groups commented on fruitful discussions of this nature taking place on the following topics:

- When Marxism itself becomes an opium of the people, as a Communist elite continues to promise the inevitability of a new, fraternal, and equal society (pie in the future when the present order is swept aside).
- The doctrinaire imposition of Marxism on societies, without adequate forms of contextualisation.
- The shallowness of any Marxist approach to subjectivity.
- When scientific socialism leads to an ambivalence of freedom by being unable to handle effectively the reality of human sin.

In all these areas, it was found useful to expose Marxists to the radical nature of the teaching of the historical Jesus, and to show that hope lay that way. We suggest that discussion also be opened about the grounds of Marxist idealism, and the record of Communist inhumanity.

Those groups that emphasised that Christians must be able to exercise sound and solid reason in their witness to Marxists also emphasised that Christian witnesses need to be specially trained for this task. We have heard of training schemes in the Third World where Christian men and women are given short courses in biblical social justice, and an introduction to the social and economic realities of poverty by exposure and discussion. We have heard of seminary students being sent to live for six months of their course in slum areas. We would recommend that all training institutions for Christian service teach an introduction to problems of achieving biblical social justice in society and in particular an awareness of Marxism. It may even be important to establish a specialist evangelical institution for training in the content of Marxism and in service in areas of mutual interest. We would encourage Christians working in these areas to produce literature, not just for the intellectual or managerial elite of Christian organizations, but for ordinary church members as well, to enable them to express their faith in obedient action with the poor.

We would strongly emphasise that the role of prayer in any Christian strategy is vital, and we call on church members to include specific prayer for the poor in their family, house group, and Sunday worship services.

There must also be a strategy for the exercise of this acquired reason. We should avoid areas of antithesis and confrontation. This yields no fruit. We should find common ground for discussion if possible, biblical themes relevant either to Marxist insights or to the situation in which both Marxists and Christians are working in order to build psychological bridges. Suggestions ranged over a wide area: history, eschatology, justice, transcendence, peace, the new man, love, hope, essential personal needs, moral integrity, the work ethic, and the family.

Sound reason is not defensive, and accepts criticism. Christians must develop this attitude in their relationships with Marxists. But, for the Christian, just criticism involves more than a mere change in ideas or concepts. It involves self-examination and repentance; and repentance involves radical changes of attitude, practice, and life-style. Yet it is just this that can be powerful in evangelism to Marxists. It is in apparent weakness that God's strength is shown, and it is not a hidden strength. The evidence of a changed and changing life is something which the honest Marxist cannot ignore, and he must soon question the power that motivates it.

E. Proclamation

The context of love, a consistent Christian life and witness, and a sound and solid ability to reason being accepted, groups had something to say about the actual presentation of the gospel facts. While some groups commended the use of the media, others felt that its usefulness was limited more to the converted than to the unconverted. These latter believed that evangelism to Marxists would have to be very largely *personal evangelism* in the case of Communist countries, *evangelism by an insider*. Some groups mentioned contact with Marxists from Communist countries who were *visiting the "free" world* as diplomats, members of sports teams, on cultural exchanges, or on trade missions.

Practically every group felt that proclamation must be based on a holistic theology that takes the form of *an explanation of God's redemption in its totality*. In this respect, the Marxist concept of alienation opens great opportunities to the Christian. Each of the Marxist theses can be constructively spoken to, only to share that they owe their origin to one over-riding alienation. Alienation from the universe, from fellowmen and women, and from ourselves, all spring from our alienation from God. Today's problems of ecology must be seen against the background of man's greed and God's promise of the redemption of the world. Breakdown in human relationships should be proclaimed as the result of man's selfishness, redeemable in the unity we have in Christ, visibly manifested in the church which seeks to evaluate the new society of the kingdom. Individual psychological tensions and miseries must be clearly recognised as the ravages and effects of sin, healed by the renewing operation of the indwelling Holy Spirit who operates in the new man in Christ. But none of these things can come about without the destruction of the primary alienation that between man and God. On this, the elimination of all alienations primarily depends, and this must be the object of our witness, obedience and proclamation.

In such ways Christians must communicate in a terminology acceptable and understood by Marxists, and this might require some work and study.

Furthermore, the church should learn to communicate beyond the borders of the middle class. An effort should be made to adapt the gospel to the context in which it is to be proclaimed.

Concerning the presentation of the gospel—The challenge of our situations of poverty and of Marxism, and, most importantly, of our study of the Scriptures requires us to ask, "What is the meaning of the Good News of Jesus Christ in each situation?" We will fail to communicate the Good News if we merely take over Marxist concepts to interpret the meanings of the Good News: for the gospel shatters and reforms all human concepts. But we must commit ourselves to seek continually for concepts adequate to the Scripture and our situation, in order to express the meaning of the Good News. We do not assume that our present formulations are adequate or final. Indeed some formulations profoundly hinder the communication of the gospel in our contexts! The false dichotomies between body and soul, the identification of sin solely with individual bad habits, the ignoring of group self-interests, the concept of shallow repentance which may enable large numbers to join the church but which hinders true discipleship, and the identification of the Word of God with clichés that become contentless, hinder communication of God's Good News. We must ask whether evangelism is only the communication of information, and whether it should be defined by the needs of the listener or measured by successful results.

We have come to understand that evangelism is to present Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit, that men may make an informed response to him. Jesus modelled evangelism by identification, deed, and word. This means that we must interact with our situation and with people around us, and must share the Good News with the authority that comes only from an honest life-style, a consistent family life, a community of love and true listening to the real hurts and dreams of people among whom we seek to be incarnate witnesses. Only when our presentation has such integrity will we be able to call people to repent in the full meaning of the term, and expect to see the fruits of repentance in our churches.

Study would also have to be given to *common Marxist distortions of the Christian gospel*, so that these could be adequately exposed and persuasively corrected. This could not be done unless it was backed by an obedient praxis.

In all this, the great priority must be *prayer and faith in the power of the Holy Spirit* to take a life and to change it utterly. This must be exercised, not only in our own evangelism, but also on behalf of all those engaged in it, especially national Christians in Marxist countries. And there must be that tangible fellowship in which we live, love, bear witness, and encourage one another unto the day of Jesus Christ.

Section II

1. A Survey of Christian Strategies in Three Areas

We suggest strategy according to the different contexts where Christians and Marxists find themselves. The interaction between them differs in each situation.

In general terms, in the developed countries of the West, the issues where debate is joined between Christianity and Marxism are at the philosophical level of the nature of reality, and the role of religion in the truly human life in a scientific materialist world. In the post-revolutionary societies, especially in Eastern Europe, the issue is religious freedom within the context of the relationship between the minorities and the government. In the prerevolutionary societies of the Third World, the issues are poverty, oppression, and exploitation. Christians in one area will more readily appreciate the concerns of Christians in the other two areas if they do not read those concerns only through the cultural spectacles of the issues between Marxism and Christianity in their own area.

A. Marxism in Western Countries

Although Marxist factions exist in most Western countries, they lack broad support and thus remain theoretical options with little chance of being implemented. This is not to say, however, that we can ignore Western Marxists. They are seeking solutions to the major Western social problems of inflation, unemployment, poverty, racism, sexism, and alienation.

Western Christians are most likely to find Marxists among the industrial working class, inner city ghetto dwellers, trade unionists, intellectuals, students, and certain professionals. The West differs from the other two regions discussed in this paper because of a large middle class which acts as a buffer between the upper and the lower classes. The middle class knows stability and varying degrees of affluence. At present, there is no real threat to the existing political parties in these countries, but given the possibility of high unemployment and devalued currencies, more and more people will consider the Marxist option. One member of the group noted that the political and economic turmoil in Italy over the last decade has brought the Communist party into a dominant position.

The Western Marxist ignores the Christian church because of its middle class tunnel vision, other-worldliness and comfortable traditionalism. He considers the church's witness to be impotent and inextricably bound to vested economic interests. In a society marked by the jolts of technological and industrial modernisation, Marxists reject the church's communal answer to alienation as superficial.

But Christians who back their gospel proclamation with a consistent life-style and corporate church witness have every opportunity lovingly to prove the Marxist wrong. While some nations have suffered under Marxist rule and other nations experience rapid social chaos, Western Christians still have the opportunity to correct present shortcomings in our political-economic systems and yet avoid the Marxist solution.

Therefore, the action of Western Christians must be twofold: first, we must unashamedly proclaim the gospel of Christ in word and deed. And second, we must offer answers to existing social problems. Our answers must be characterised by a biblical realism which is unafraid of facing harsh social facts, listening to criticism of our systems, and aggressively desiring to implement justice.

The question then arises—how is justice implemented? Marxism is a systematic response to political-economic problems. If the Christian chooses to meet the Marxist on his own turf, then he must offer some political-economic structural alternative. Christian life-style and corporate church witness will not be enough. Society also includes those individuals who do not belong to the church. The Marxist asks: What of justice for these? Can the church's example alone adequately alter structures?

While Western Christians want to avoid tying the church to a given political-economic system, we are called upon to offer a systematic alternative. Group members offered various suggestions as to how to resolve this dilemma.

(i) One recommendation was to use the Old Testament pattern as a clear-cut blueprint. The Bible offers a viable systematic alternative for Christians.

(ii) Another suggested that the church only get involved in the political-economic arena as "the church." Christians should not join a party but rather act as a separate prophetic community standing outside of the existing structures.

(iii) A third suggestion stressed that the church act as an outside prophetic community, but added that its members should offer structural Christian alternatives distinct from those presently in practice. The problem remains—Christians have so dichotomized life into separate spheres that no one has begun to think of possible alternatives. It is the church's challenge to construct a biblical solution.

(iv) A fourth recommendation emphasized that there is no political or economic blueprint that can be gleaned from Scripture and applied to our times. It is biblical principles that must be applied to one of the historical political-economic possibilities. Economics is not a "Christian" subject *per se*. It is a neutral concept which encompasses various systems that may be morally judged with the help of biblical principles. There are only so many historical economic options—monarchy/ dictatorship, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy, totalitarian rule, etc. The merits of each should be judged in light of our knowledge of Scriptures. No form will be perfect, but they can be legitimately compared.

In reaching Marxists, Western Christians will have to work outside of the traditional means of church services and evangelistic meetings. Marxists are unlikely to show up at either. The opportunity to witness must be prepared. They must be grounded in the Scriptures and also know a great deal about economics, political theory, sacred and secular history, and philosophy. This training is not easily attained but comes from a continued education.

To facilitate such training, we recommend that Bible colleges, seminaries, and other Christian schools recognise the influence of Marxism in our times, and adopt courses dealing with this subject in their curriculum. We also recommend that study centres be formed in urban areas to offer a specialized training in this field.

B. Reaching Marxists in Eastern Europe

(i) *The Post-Revolutionary Situation*

In Eastern Europe the church today faces the children of the revolution, a whole new generation of people raised within a Marxist educational system and under an assumed scientific atheism. This new generation of people live in a post-revolutionary situation, with its resulting disillusionment and yearning for a new faith to live by. The church is faced with a multitude, especially the young, who being dissatisfied with a materialist philosophy ask once more the age-old question... What is the meaning of my existence?

From the start, Eastern Europe must be seen as a variety of different situations where government restrictions and resultant church behaviour differ. The West must not see the situation as monolithic. It is not one government which is acting towards one church. Eastern Europe should be seen individually as a host of countries and a variety of church settings. In this respect, it must be noted that certain East European countries were absent from the COWE Thailand Consultation (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Albania), and so were unable to make their own specific national contributions. We recommend to COWE that the subject of reaching East Europeans be given its proper place on any future agenda.

(ii) *The Church*

The church in Eastern Europe, under the Holy Spirit, will survive any form of political system imposed upon it. History proves that Christian faith has outlasted all systems. It sees itself as not primarily capitalist or socialist. The church is not a political system. It lives and witnesses to Christ in any situation.

Present church structures, as well as government restrictions, often contribute to the lack of evangelistic effort in the churches in Eastern Europe. In this respect, the following observations must be made:

(a) We confess that the spirit of evangelism is not the general attitude of the churches in Eastern Europe nor of its leaders. We will therefore pray and work to restore evangelism to its central role in the life of the local church and the individual believer.

(b) We recognize that often our church structures are imposed on us from above and that the spirit of evangelism is often not a priority among church leaders themselves.

(c) Pastors of the local church are the key to evangelism. Yet without encouragement, training in evangelism, and priority planning by official church bodies, evangelism is often overlooked as an integral part of the church life. We encourage seminars about evangelism for pastors throughout our countries.

(d) In Eastern Europe evangelical sub-cultures have sometimes insulated themselves from the society around them. We encourage Christians to break out from these sub-cultures into society, and face the real world with the dynamic of the Christian witness.

(e) We urge that in Eastern Europe state intervention in church affairs cease and that "the complete separation of church and state" as guaranteed by the constitution becomes the practice of the nation and its officials.

(iii) *Points of Contact*

Evangelicals who live in socialist states do find themselves working with Marxists in those areas which serve the common good of society and the nation.

(a) *At ideological level*—The ideological-level discussion and dialogue with Marxists are tolerated in some countries.

(b) *At social service level*—In most countries, the churches are prevented by law from being involved in organised social services. In East Germany, however, the churches carry on an extensive social service ministry with the full support of the state.

(c) *At private levels*—Interaction is possible through personal contacts between the Christian and the Marxist. Faith is shared on a one-to-one basis. Personal evangelism is practised across the land while mass evangelism is more tightly restricted.

(iv) *How Shall They Hear?*

(a) *Preparation for proclamation*

(1) Any strategy that fails to recognise the spiritual dimensions of the task of reaching Marxists is destined to failure. In that endeavour, as in all evangelistic outreach, the power of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the cross are pivotal (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:21-23).

(2) Intellectual—The Marxist world-view officially promoted through state-controlled education institutions seems to permeate the mind-set of East Europeans. The church is in the midst of this thinking, and its people are not exempt from its pervading influence.

Therefore, theological training for evangelism which sets forth the Christian apologetic to the Marxist challenge is an imperative. The necessity of creative and scientific criticism of Marxist philosophy must be emphasised. Questioning the Marxist position becomes as important as answering the Marxist questions.

(b) *Methods of proclamation*

Conventional methods (preaching, witnessing, literature, radio broadcasting, Sunday Schools, home Bible study groups, youth work, etc.) are applicable to some extent—depending on the degree of religious tolerance.

Individual conversions of Marxists should be studied as examples of developing specific methods. Such experiences should be shared among Christians.

Evangelical churches and missions in the West should see Eastern Europe as a prime area for their attention and ministry. The present concern of the West for Eastern Europe seems to be at a low level, and the exchange of information very inadequate. We look to the West for help in evangelism.

(c) *The role of the West in proclamation*

(1) We very much appreciate the work of Christians in other countries who have risked a great deal to make Bibles and Christian literature available to us. Bibles are invaluable—and hard to come by in most Eastern European countries. We plead that Christians in the West continue to send material help to the church in East Europe; i.e., Bibles, publications, radio broadcasts, theological training and seminars, aid at times of natural disasters, etc.

(2) Western agencies sometimes take part in seeking to help us evangelize our countries in almost complete ignorance of Marxism. We especially ask them to avoid coming with neatly packed answers to social and spiritual needs which they have not studied. We ask them to consult us in choosing who is to come and work in our countries. We ask them to conform to the lifestyle of the situation in which they find themselves. We ask them to allow us freedom of decision-making in the programmes that we undertake for evangelization. We urge our brothers in the West carefully to avoid the spirit and methods of multi-national companies.

(3) We ask that Western agencies publicise the great blessings and revivals that are going on in our countries. It does not honour God merely to report examples of persecution for fund-raising purposes.

(4) Western fellowship is sometimes embarrassing and even hurtful when church leaders in high positions accept red-carpet treatment from authorities in our countries and visit the one or two churches which exist in large cities. They should seek access to small and

unregistered congregations as well as to large registered ones. However, we encourage Christians from other countries to take every opportunity to visit us.

(5) We urge Christians in other lands to plead the cause of their brothers and sisters in Christ at every opportunity (state visits, press, cultural exchanges, etc). The personal safety of some of the East European COWE delegates has been due, under God, to the pressures exerted by the publicity their causes have received in other countries. We ask, in accordance with Section 13 of the Lausanne Covenant, that Christians raise their voices against the persecution of Christians, Jews, dissident groups, and racial minorities in Communist countries.

(v) A Word in Love to Our Brethren Elsewhere

We fear that churches in other countries may be blind to the problems of Marxism and insensitive to the fact that, to us, they appear to be collaborating with people of the very same philosophy under which we are groaning. As we seek to be sensitive to the concern of such Christians for true social justice for the poor, we ask that they be sensitive to the way their discussions with Marxists can sometimes appear to us. We recognise, though, that few of us live at the level of that terrible poverty and hunger that stalks the Third World, and that we might become more open to the possibilities of such dialogue and common action with Marxists if we were to live in Third World countries. Nevertheless, we ask how far Christianity can complement Marxism. Can it add a new dimension to Marxist-socialist society? Can Marxist priorities be rearranged so that concern for justice in the low-economic sphere has a higher priority than the elimination of religion?

We feel we want to share with churches that live in pre-revolutionary societies the following lessons from our experience:

(a) Keep in touch with poor people. When an upheaval comes in a society, many of the middle class flee. The poor remain. For the witness of the gospel to remain rooted in the country, it must be rooted among the poor. We urge the church to develop clear identification with the people.

(b) Do not be identified with the secular authorities. The church must have a true independence in the country before a revolution, if it wants to remain independent after one. The church should be a more faithful repository of the people's trust than the state.

(c) In all circumstances, "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

(d) Prepare yourselves structurally, psychologically, and in every other way to work and witness under severe restrictions, even underground, in preparation for a possible sudden change in circumstances. This must include the training of parents to bring up their children in Christ in a situation in which all education will degenerate into deliberate atheist indoctrination with pressure.

(e) "They that endure to the end will be saved" (cf. Mark 13:13)

(vi) Conclusion

Reaching Marxists in Eastern Europe is an enormous and complex task. If this goal is to be reached to any possible extent, several conditions must be met:

First, the whole of God's people must become aware that such a task cannot be achieved by human efforts alone. The importance of prayer and obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ must be emphasised in all of the evangelical churches. In addition to that, a new awareness and concern for the lost millions in Eastern Europe must be stimulated in our churches so that they face the Great Commission seriously.

Secondly, the evangelical Christian churches and missionary agencies in the West should identify with the spiritual needs of Eastern Europe. They should be more generous and sacrificial as they support the cause of the gospel in our countries. Thus we plead for prayer and support, as we commit ourselves in the spirit of the Lausanne Covenant and in obedience to the Great Commission to do our best in order that "they may hear."

C. Christian Strategy in Third World

In the pre-revolutionary societies of the Third World, the issues for debate between the Christians and Marxists are the poverty, oppression, and exploitation which characterise these societies.

The largest people group in the world are the poor people who make up one-quarter of the world's population. The category of poor people is a socio-economic category, and Marxism is a social and political and economic analysis and programme for society. We, therefore, must move beyond the anthropological categories of the "peoples' group" approach if we are to develop Good News for the poor (Luke 4:18) and enter into credible interaction with Marxists.

In the Third World, the level of interaction with Marxists must be on the level of action for justice for the poorest and the powerless in society. So urgent are the problems of poverty, and so committed are many Marxists to grappling with them, that they do not have the time for what they consider the escapist luxury of debating with Christians. They speak of praxis, action that reveals one's commitments. They will look first at the actions and commitments of the church in the Third World—as expressed in those areas of life that bring or deny true justice for the poor.

We must not assume that all movements for national liberation and social justice in the Third World are necessarily Marxist. To be on the side of the poor people for social justice is not the sole prerogative of Marxists: it is, according to the Scriptures, the deep concern and activity of Almighty God (Ps. 10: 12-18), and thus of his people. All men demonstrate the mark of their Creator on them when they demonstrate concern for justice for the poorest.

As Christians living and working in poor societies, we ask that, when we work with the poor for justice, we should not be branded automatically as Marxist. Christians who are truly concerned for the glory of the God of justice and righteousness have no cause to be scared of movements for justice, or even of Marxism in the Third World. Those in positions of power in our world may have some reason to be afraid, but Christians have no brief to defend their interests against the exploited.

At the same time, we recognise that most of us are in elite positions in poor societies, and belong mainly to the privileged groups. Our great danger is that we will suggest what ought to happen at the bottom of society, and, in a paternalistic fashion, work to achieve it on behalf of, and for, the poor and oppressed. This is not a biblical model.

In our concern, we begin with the biblical doctrine of the body of Christ. In Christ's body all members have a role to play and a gift to contribute in service for the good of the whole. This we take to be a microcosm and a model for God's will for society as a whole. That is, that men grow to their full stature in society when, in proper interdependence, each one is able to contribute his gift in service to the society as a whole. Such a true and fulfilled humanity is only possible in the Body of Christ. But it gives a pattern for the sort of human relationships we should seek to encourage in society. A prophet has no programme for society, and we have observed from Marxism how any programme can be a straitjacket for man. However, the model of the Body of Christ gives a pattern for human relationships according to the will of God. Where man cannot live in such relationships, Christians have begun in some parts of the Third World to work with poor people to achieve them.

For example, in India, a development worker with one indigenous missionary society has been living among palm-tree tappers. He found they were being charged huge interest rates on small loans from money-lenders and knew nothing about assistance programmes that the government had set up. He, therefore, set about making the people aware of the way they were being exploited and how they could get government help. In such a way, these men are being made aware that there is a new and alternative pattern of human relationships that will not exploit them. When the question arises of how these can be achieved, appropriated, and consolidated, the question of the reconciliation that Christ achieves between God and man, and man and man, becomes the central item of the agenda. This is why the local church must be at the centre of such work, so that the motivating and transforming power of Christ in his body is seen to be central to the development of truly human relationships.

A local church Sunday School decided to invite children from the slum across the road to their Vacation Bible School. Two hundred came. The teachers decided to follow their interest by visiting their homes and finding out from their families what they would like the church to initiate with them. The great need was for homework assistance to help the children keep up with their school studies. Their parents were illiterate and could give no help to their children, as they

struggled in school classes of 60 or more. By the age of 10 or 11, these children would then join the 70 per cent of children who drop out of school in India before becoming literate. With the help of unemployed teachers in the slum, a homework club was started with 180 children enrolled. They have visited the Bible School and church services since then.

Elsewhere, a local church-based group has set up tenants' associations in a slum and asked Christian lawyers to fight eviction orders that would make people homeless.

The local expression of the Body of Christ is central to the proclamation of the Good News of God's Kingdom of right relationships. We strongly felt that the focus and goal of training Christians for reaching Marxists should be the training of the whole church to serve the poor and oppressed in practical ways. To this end, some practical training of people as catalysts will be useful. From case studies, we have observed and discovered the following guiding principles:

(i) Evangelism is more than verbalizing the gospel. It should have as its guarantee practical obedience where we put the Good News into practice. The early church lived visibly its own proclamation, not changing the structures of society directly but fermenting society. Therefore we should study and develop appropriate models of obedient action.

(ii) The church cannot stay out of politics, for to stay out is to be politically active. (It is evident that on this issue the perception of Eastern bloc Christians differs.) There is no such thing as neutrality. In one country, the whole church remained "neutral" and ignorant of the social reality until a social revolution took place. Then the church asked for seminars in order to understand what was happening to their country. The church expressed great appreciation for these seminars and, since that time, has experienced growth at the rate of 20 per cent per year.

(iii) The church must develop meaningful links with poor people, and, in many cases, live among them or very near them in order that they may cease to be the church *to* the poor and become the church *for*, with, and of the poor.

We have heard of cases in India where Christians have held meetings for Trade Union leaders to come and discuss their concerns, where a rich Christian family had supported a poorer family in the area until, after six years, that family is in a position to support another family in turn, and where young people have gone to live in slums for a six month period to get to know poor people and work alongside them on community projects. To put these principles into practice, we suggest the following practical steps:

- Concrete and specific emphasis on meaning of repentance in terms of individual and corporate life.
- Leaders and congregations must learn to be sensitive in the choices they make in order to avoid offence that is not the offence of the cross, e.g., meeting in five-star hotels, buying expensive musical instruments, building expensive church buildings, etc.
- Developing an accurate church apologetic.
- Bringing pressure to bear on theological institutions for a biblical reform in the theological education in realistic context.
- Encouragement in local congregations of social sensitivity, leading to positive protest.
- Insistence in local congregations that worship, fellowship, proclamation, and teaching be in the context of sacrificial service.
- Total review of systems and machinery of church administration at every level to discourage control of churches only by those who know how to work the system, or who have the time to give to it.

Practical training of the whole church in sensitivity and service. That could lead to sharpening of spiritual gifts in congregations:

- the gift of teaching which awakens an awareness in others of the following gifts and sharpens them in the use of them.
- the gift of prayer—all must pray; but, for some, it will be a special gift, not making them superior, but exercised in the total activities of congregations.
- the gift of evangelistic proclamation.
- the gift of practical, sacrificial, and challenging service in every area of social need.
- the gift of active, positive, critical, and prophetic political involvement at factory, office, community, local and national level.
- the gift of making just economic judgements, and challenges to obedience.
- the gift of writing (literature).

Liberation Theology

In discussing the challenge of reaching Marxists, we cannot avoid the issues raised by Liberation Theology in Latin America. The group felt that they would have numerous and various questions to ask of liberation theologians in detail. But it is imperative first to listen to their concerns for justice for the poor, test those concerns and their exegesis by the Scriptures; and, where we are truly challenged to repent for being blind to the Scripture's concern for the poor and powerless, to admit in humility that God's prophetic word may have been spoken to us through them. If we think that the Scriptures say more than the liberation theologians seem to say, then we should seek to share this in a spirit of brotherhood and love rather than antagonism which may be based on ignorance.

In developing our dialogue with liberation theologians, we think that it is most important to understand the nature of evil; that evil is more than structural (while often finding expression in structures); and that human relationships cannot be redeemed or just relationships established apart from the work of Christ who defeated evil on the cross, took the penalty for man's subservience to sin and evil in his own body, and rose victorious over all the powers of sin and death and the devil, to be the head of a new race of men who would do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. Our dialogue will therefore have to issue in such works as give evidence to our faith. Our understanding that sin is never finally eliminated in human society or in the human heart, before the return of Christ in victory, both gives us cause to suspect utopian expectations, and also to evaluate critically our own judgements and obedience in the church, as we serve the God of justice and justification.

Conclusion

Our focus is to reach Marxists with the gospel of Jesus Christ which, we believe, in hope and experience promises and delivers a liberation more complete, more total, more human, and infinitely more certain than the Marxist promise or experience.

Yet we confess that, as the servants of Jesus Christ, the church has much to learn through the criticisms and challenges of Marxism, and the commitment of many Marxists to justice for the poor.

In reaching Marxists of any variety with the gospel, we affirm that the economic and social debate must not be the focus of our task. Christians are called neither to defend or attack capitalism or socialism, but to love people into God's Kingdom which transforms and transcends all structures of society.

In our concern to reach Marxists, we have been compelled by Scripture to seek justice for and with the poor and oppressed. Therefore, we have to look at the roots of oppression, which are evident in all social and economic systems. We affirm that the full communication and expansion of the gospel of Jesus Christ in any society requires a socio-political and economic dimension. But we cannot identify any one expression as uniquely or distinctly Christian. We are on a pilgrimage as God's people, journeying to the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God, but always seeking that the city of God, where justice and righteousness dwells continually, may come down to be a reality among us.

Appendix A Adaptability in Meeting the Situation

The involvement of committed Christians in various attempts to change situations and structures of injustice and oppression in the Third World has demonstrated in practise that the Marxist theory that religion is the opium of the people is no longer valid.

In certain sections of the Catholic Church in Latin America a new phenomenon has arisen in recent years. It is the rapid growth of grass roots ecclesial communities (*comunidades eclesiales de base*). These communities exist among the rural and urban poor. They are basically led by nonprofessional Christians, though clergy and sisters take part in working and group Bible study. They are unattached to existing parochial structures, though considering themselves part of the Catholic church. They are characterised by their contacts among the poor; by their extended study of the Bible; by the simplicity and depth of participation of their worship; by their commitment to Jesus Christ; by their community work on behalf of those who suffer impoverishment and an undignified life, because of the political and economic system of the government; and by their struggle to understand the relevance of the biblical message to the wider circumstances of

their nation.

Whereas we might have some reservations (at times quite serious), about the content of their understanding of the whole gospel, we believe that this kind of model could be adopted on a wide scale by evangelical churches, in order both to evangelize on a personal level, and to be involved in a serious and effective way in the search for the kind of society where exploitation of the majority by the few is no longer possible. We commend this kind of experiment as a new way of seeing the church's total evangelistic task in areas of great poverty where the masses have no freedom to express their real concerns. We also believe that such communities would be powerful testimonies to Marxists of the truth and power of Jesus Christ.

We believe that the option between free-market capitalism and Marxist socialism is historically a false and unnecessary choice in the Third World, though such a choice undoubtedly redounds to the benefit of either the Western individualist nations or the USSR and her satellites. We believe that revolutions in some undeveloped countries may issue in new styles of development, and independently of the two major existing economic models. In those instances, the church should encourage the present authorities insofar as they bring real improvements and a measure of freedom to those who have suffered oppression in the past. Churches throughout the world ought to support such Christians in their witness to Jesus Christ within those new situations.

Appendix B **The Testimony of a Communist Student Leader in a Latin American University**

While in university I became involved in politics and subversion on a national level. My grandfather had been an active Marxist for 45 years, my uncle was killed in guerilla fighting, and I devoted myself fully to the Marxist cause for the sake of the poor.

I became the secretary of the Communist movement in the university during my second year as a student. I spent most of my money on behalf of Marxism. During my second year the radical break between two divisions in the Marxist forces occurred.

My disillusionment with Marxism came as I began to realize that the leadership of the Communist party was not honest. For example, my Marxist professor used dirty language and was unable to answer my searching philosophical questions, while party leaders were siphoning off party funds.

About this time I came into contact with some Christians who impressed me with their sincerity and their obvious concern for me. Up to that time I had wanted to have nothing to do with any Christians during my early years. Then, during the time of uncertainty I met a high school student who impressed me with his clear testimony, "I have Jesus Christ in my heart." I had never heard anyone say anything like that before. At first, it was not so much what he believed that impressed me, but the fact that he really believed it.

At this time I became friends with an American missionary who showed real concern for my spiritual welfare. We talked far into the night on several occasions. I could tell that he really meant what he said. He cared. He wanted me to know his Saviour.

I read the New Testament to find contradictions in it, but found none. I had always been convinced that Christians didn't care about the poor, but, reading the Bible, I discovered my error. Jesus had taught his followers to demonstrate deep concern for the poor. Marxists teach their followers to analyse other philosophical systems and movements. I began to analyse Jesus Christ. When I read his life and teachings and saw how completely he understood the human heart and all the problems in the world, I asked myself, "How could Jesus know so much? He's the son of a carpenter, so he couldn't have been eligible for higher education." In my country the children of carpenters would never be able to have advanced education.

The honesty and sincerity of the Christians with whom I had contact affected me deeply. Sometimes when I asked them complicated or difficult questions, they would respond simply and sincerely: "I don't know." This impressed me. It was the wholehearted consistency of their lives and the reality of their faith which the Holy Spirit used to impress upon me the truth of the Word of God.

After six months of intellectual crisis, I bent my knees to God in 1971. Since then my grandfather and other Communist youth leaders have also become Christians. My brother's immediate reaction to my conversion was, "That is ridiculous!" However, three years later he too was converted and is now a pastor. All of us can witness that we were attracted to Christ by the supernatural nature of the message, rather than by Christian socio-political answers.

This paper is based on reports from groups and individuals ministering in many countries, including some in Eastern Europe and other Marxist states. The names of all participants have not been included, nor would every participant agree with everything contained in the paper. The following participants, however, acknowledge executive responsibility.

Philip LeFeuvre - Co-ordinator
Elias Golonka - Secretary
Christopher Sugden - Secretary
Gerardo Gutierrez - Recorder

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