
Introduction

Karl Marx wanted to dedicate his masterpiece, *Capital*, to Charles Darwin. But the Darwin family prevented it because they didn't want their names associated with the famous social radical. Still, Marx shared with Darwin the same intellectual passion—to understand a world that had suddenly become mysterious.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, missionaries and naturalists were sending home to London and to Paris the most extraordinary descriptions of the diversity of life on planet Earth. It was an unintended effect of European colonialism. Their sketches and specimens had to be cataloged for eventual public display. The natural history museum was being born, and that meant an immense effort at sorting out this astonishing variety of life into some rational pattern, classifying and arranging specimens side by side so that they could be presented as a visual narrative on the museum floor. It required an *understanding* of what you were trying to display.

Simultaneously, the geologists were vastly expanding the notion of the length of time life had existed on Earth, making space in our intellectual imagination for the idea of gradual but enormous change. The fossil record was full of evidence of such change. While climbing in Chile, Darwin found at ten

thousand feet the fossil remains of simple life-forms that had once flourished *at the bottom of the sea*. And the fossil record showed a single direction—from simple to ever more divergent and complex life-forms. Vast time and vast change over time opened the door for the theory of life evolving, and our human life as part of that larger story.

Both Darwin and Marx saw what it meant: Humans *belong to this earth*. This is where we were born and grew and evolved. As Darwin had found the key to unlock the mystery of natural evolution, of how the incredible diversity of life on Earth came to be, so Marx sought to understand the pattern and logic of human evolution in society. Like philosophers before him, what Marx found distinctive about the human animal is our acute degree of self-reflectiveness. He saw this human consciousness as an unfolding process, the result of our continuing interaction with our material environment.

For Marx we are, like all other animals, sensuous and tactile creatures. Self-awareness is our species' way of being in touch with that reality. And the contents of consciousness are a result of that continuing interaction. The engine of that interaction is human work. It is what Marx called our "species being." Work is far more than what we do "to make a living," although that is how most of us think of work today. Human living is not something we "make" but something we do. And for Marx, as a species we do our living in an active way, transforming the material world we live in through our use of tools. The human is the tool-using animal; it is our species-specific characteristic. At first this may seem like crass reductionism, but hold that judgment until you see what he means.

By using tools we transform the material environment upon which we depend for our survival, and in the process we transform ourselves. We first transform ourselves biologically. Marx's friend, Friedrich Engels, wrote a fascinating essay on the human thumb.¹ Today we know that the opposable thumb evolved simultaneously with the higher brain or neocortex; archaeological evidence shows a simultaneous expansion and diversification of the types and uses of tools. Tools put an evolving human thumb together with an evolving human neocortex, each feeding the other in a positive feedback system that became our species' survival wager. We evolved as a species that would survive on the basis of consciousness interacting with tools. But it is not just our biology that changes over time. Human work transforms society, our everyday way of life with others, and with that our religious and philosophical ideas change. For Marx, the final product of our human work is ourselves as a working, thinking, still-evolving species.

Marx, like Darwin, is not simply a scientist but also a moralist, one who boldly paints in the dots that reveal the picture of the larger human drama, and

what it implies for our place and action within that drama. And like Darwin, Marx saw this picture energized by struggle. For Darwin, individuals within one species compete with one another for food to survive, and species depending upon the same food supply compete with one another. For Marx, different social classes in history have competed with one another to gain control over the surplus of their common labor. Master against slave, lord against serf, guild master against apprentice and, in our day, capitalist against worker—what the past shows us, Marx said, is that history is “the history of class struggles.”²

True, looked at in one way the division of labor is the story of an evolving and ever more complex form of human cooperation. Marx understood that and called it “the social powers of production.” He was quite willing to admit that capitalism had energized a veritable explosion of productive capacity. Still, this cooperation in the division of labor is time and again co-opted to serve the interests of the privileged class. Everything is drawn by power into this politics of class domination. Indeed, consciousness itself—our ideas about the world, about the good and the beautiful, our hopes and dreams and envies and fears—all are drawn into the class struggle, but secretly, and without our noticing it. Marx called this “false consciousness,” when class inequalities come to be seen as the intention of the gods, or the legacy of karma, or, more recently, the result of alleged individual merit. About these ideas that justify power and privilege, Marx said, “The ruling ideas of an era are ever the ideas of its ruling class.”³ Ideas have the power to rule, and they do so with more subtlety, and therefore with more effectiveness, than guns.

But we must keep these insights in their proper order. For Marx the tool symbolizes first and above all else *vast human collaboration over time*. The unfolding human story is the story, yes, of struggle, but even more it is the story of gifts passed down, refined, and made more elaborate through the generations. It is the legacy of human work embedded in tools. Take the example of human hammering devices. The earliest were most likely a stone and a stick. Each had its advantages. The stone would not break when striking something solid like wood. And the stick would add length and therefore torque to the human arm. For hundreds of thousands of years the stick and the stone were all we had, but then came a moment of tremendous creativity. With the invention of the stone ax we combined the advantages of both pounding devices.

Or take another example, the history of magnification. The earliest magnifying tool was probably a stone that had been accidentally heated by a fire, which altered its internal organization. Undoubtedly it became an object of religious worship because it carried powerful mysteries within it. It could transform sun into fire. As the story of magnification continued, after thousands of

generations our predecessors at the great workbench of humanity would discover the art of glass-making, of grinding and of making lenses. And not long after that they would put one lens in front of another, and still another . . . and produce the telescope.

This new tool, the telescope, brought us miracles we did not find at all comforting. Forced by the Catholic Church to recant his hypothesis about Earth moving around the Sun, Galileo muttered under his breath, “nevertheless it moves.” And three hundred years later—a mere tick of the clock as human evolution counts time—the large optical telescopes of the 1930s and 1940s would show us that many of the stars (suns) of our Milky Way were not stars in our galaxy at all but were instead galaxies of their own, each with its millions of suns. And with that we had to start to rewrite all our cosmologies, all our stories of creation, all our religious ideas about the place of humans in the universe. The tool called magnification rendered our older myths—the contents of our consciousness—not so much wrong as no longer able to guide us. It was not, as the newspapers announced at the time, that man had “conquered space,” but that space (in its immensity!) had invaded and (pre)occupied our human mind. Today, we have seen our small and fragile planet—our species’ home—from the perspective of the moon. And suddenly the moral prescriptions that have guided human behavior—prescriptions about domination and power and ever-expanding growth—are rendered obsolete, and even dangerous.

What we have pictured to us here is the vision of Karl Marx, the humanist, in dialogue with that other great storyteller of his time, Charles Darwin. Like the Hebrew prophets before him, Marx was driven by a passion for truth and for justice. And justice could not be confined to distributive justice or to the established practices of law (“procedural justice”). The question of justice was lodged in and had to address our species being, our fundamental way of life. It had to address, in short, the organization and control of human labor. In his quest for justice Marx discovered that the master tool of the modern world was money. The human tool called money had come to organize the interaction of all other tools and the social relations of the division of labor.

Beginning three hundred years ago with people like John Locke and Adam Smith a new vision came to possess the minds and hearts of the West—or at least the elites of the West. It was the vision of endlessly expanding markets breaking beyond the old limits of face-to-face barter. With money, not only would markets expand to incorporate wider and wider populations and thus hugely diversify the division of human labor, but competition among the producers would force producers to diversify their product line. Now new and undreamed-of satisfactions became possible. The old, one kind of apple would

be replaced by apples for immediate eating, or different apples for winter storing, or still different apples to cook in pies or to make applesauce. The picture of human desires, of possible human satisfactions began to expand under what seemed a limitless horizon. Today, we call this the Capitalist Revolution.

In our day this revolution has reached the farthest corners of the earth. The tool of money has produced the miracle of the new global market and the ubiquitous shopping mall. Read *The Communist Manifesto*, written more than one hundred and fifty years ago, and you will discover that Marx foresaw it all. And his criticism of what he foresaw in that document, which was even more forcefully inscribed in his essay on *Estranged Labor*, should lead us to serious reflections upon how we conceive of human work in the twenty-first century. According to Marx, when people no longer control their tools, they no longer control their own destiny. When we collectively let our tools be organized by the logic of global financial markets, we have let an alien “god” take over our continuing human journey. And that journey is the journey of human work, the final product of which is our own still-evolving species.

Like the Hebrew prophets of old, Marx knew that to speak of social justice we must become socially self-critical, and that means becoming critical of the ruling powers—whether they be kings or priests or investment bankers. Power and privilege in society always disguise their own arbitrariness behind the facade of fair play, which may be called providence or karma or standardized test scores. Whatever basis is used to claim an objective and unbiased perspective, such claims need critical analysis and challenge. For Marx, all ideas are relative to the social location and interests of their production. And like the prophets before him, the most revealing perspective is not from the top down or from the center outward, but the view of “the widow and the orphan”—the point of view of the exploited and the marginalized. Suffering can see through and unveil official explanations; it can cry out and protest against the arrogance of power.

And this brings us to how Marx viewed religion. When we think about Marx and religion the first thing that comes to mind is his famous statement, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” That is, we tend to think that Marx had a monolithically negative view of religion. But that is not the case. Immediately preceding this language of the “opiate” we find the following: “Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions.”⁴ Here Marx recognizes in religion an active moral agency, especially for the deprived and despised. Religion is not simply the ideological expression of the powerful, legitimating the social hierarchy—as in the case, for example, of singing hymns

with the hidden message that as there is a “King in Heaven” so there shall and should be kings on earth. No, for Marx in the hands and voices of the poor and exploited religion is “protest”: It is a crying out against “real suffering,” not illusory sufferings such as fear of punishment from the gods or sufferings caused by some “impurity” inherited from a previous incarnation.

The most important reflections of Marx on religion are found in his struggle to understand the nature and origin of human self-awareness. In that struggle his primary dialogue partner is the philosopher Hegel. Marx claims that he found Hegel standing on his head and corrected Hegel’s idealist philosophy by putting him back on his feet, using a materialist critique. In a remarkable quotation, Marx puts together the ideas of “consciousness,” “sensuousness,” and “suffering.” Here is what he said:

Imagine a being which is neither an object itself nor has an object. In the first place, such a being would be the *only* being; no other being would exist outside it, it would exist in a condition of solitude. For as soon as there are objects outside me, as soon as I am not *alone*, I am *another*, a reality *other* than the object outside me. For this third object I am therefore a *reality* other than it, i.e. *its* object. A being which is not the object of another being therefore presupposes that *no* objective being exists. As soon as I have an object, this object has me for its object. But a non-objective being is an unreal, non-sensuous, merely thought, i.e. merely conceived being, a being of abstraction. To be *sensuous*, i.e. to be real, is to be an object of sense, a *sensuous* object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one’s sense perception. To be sensuous is to *suffer* (to be subjected to the actions of another).⁵

Marx is arguing against Hegel here. Consciousness or self-awareness requires the material world as the *over against* (“the object”) in relationship to which we become, in effect, a perspective thrown back upon our own perspective. Such self-awareness is always a sensuous relationship, not a mere abstraction. It is a tactile relationship responding to the concrete material world. That is not an easy intimacy, however. It involves suffering and struggling because consciousness, in opposing itself to the givenness of the world, opposes itself to what seems the finality and inevitability of that world. It reaches out from the already in passionate longing for the not yet. Marx goes on:

Man as an objective sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being, and because he feels his suffering [*Leiden*], he is a *passionate* [*leidenschaftliches*] being. Passion is man’s essential power vigorously striving to attain its object.⁶

What Marx objected to in Hegel was Hegel’s idealism: Man is most himself when involved in the activity of *critical consciousness*—consciousness that has returned to itself from any external action and come to rest within itself

as a critical perspective upon its own action. It's a kind of aristocracy of separation and distance. For Marx, this was not only elitist, it was a denial of the sensuous, active and therefore *real* human being. For the real human being is not thought but *praxis*—thought engaging itself by engaging its activity in the world. If that seems abstract think of the tool and the thumb, and how it was only in relation to those that we evolved the higher brain or neocortex. The minded creature is not some lonely abstraction squatting outside the world, calculating its self-interests or admiring its critical sophistication. Marx sees humans as fundamentally embodied, not as a spirit trapped in a body. Indeed, for Marx, we are a body *inside of* another body.

One of the more fascinating aspects of the grasp Marx had on our life as sensuous beings is his understanding of our relationship to nature. It is part of his understanding of human reality that opens his thoughts to a radical perspective on the environmental question. Marx did not explore these issues because at the end of the nineteenth century they had not yet become evident. Like others, Marx thought of nature as able to support an indeterminate amount of growth in human productive activity. Today, we know that is not true—although we have yet to discipline our activity to that reality. Nevertheless, as the following quotation makes clear, Marx understood that nature is our second body, and that we live only by staying in constant touch with that larger body:

Nature is man's *inorganic body*, that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.⁷

Notice that word “dialogue.” It is our species' specific way of being in, with, and of nature. We are *conscious* in our life activity, involved in a conversation, and in that sense enjoy (and also are responsible for) a freedom that other animals in their life activity do not have. Marx put it this way:

The animal is immediately one with its life activity, not distinct from it. The animal is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself into an object of will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he immediately identifies. . . . Only on that account is his activity free activity. Alienated labor reverses the relationship in that man, since he is a conscious being, makes his activity, his essence, *only a means* for his existence.⁸

We all have two bodies—although many of us think we have only one, our inside-the-skin body. We hold onto that body, sometimes quite desperately, because it seems to offer us our only hold on life. Our inside-the-skin

body distinguishes and separates us. It makes us humans and not fish. It makes us male or female, black or white or in between. It locates us as members of this nation and not another one. It makes us here and not there, now and not then. It borders us (and concerning these boundaries innumerable wars have been fought).

But each of us has another body, and it is a body we all share. It is even more crucial to our life than our private or individual body. It is our outside-the-skin body from which, as Marx saw, we constantly draw our life. We breathe; we take in food and water. We see; we smell; we touch and taste and feel. Indeed, we are very much like the amoeba: We are engaged in a constant process of osmosis, a passing back and forth between our inside and our outside.

In our unique species' freedom we have become unfree. Today most of us work because that is how we "make a living." For Marx that is an expression of alienated work. Work, the way we evolve ourselves as an unfinished species, has been reduced to a mere means of our individual survival. Instead, "The object of labor is the *objectification of man's species life*: he produces himself not only intellectually, as in consciousness, but also actively in a real sense and *contemplates himself in a world he has made*."⁹

It is a striking phrase, to contemplate ourselves in a world we have made. Culture is a product of human labor, and culture is the master tool by which we put ourselves in touch not just with each other but also in dialogue with nature. Culture, as an unfinished product of our work, is our extended body that inserts us into the body of nature in culturally specific ways. It is important to see ourselves in this activity and not be swallowed as if embedded in some finished reality or inevitability. As a species living in the already, we are directed toward the not yet. And this issue of transcendence and freedom returns us once again to the question of religion.

Remember, for Marx the essence of religion is its voicing of "suffering"—its crying out against the realities of exploitation and degradation. And as we have just seen, the essence of being human is a passionate suffering, a struggle to take back into our hands a world we have made but which is then taken away from us. Why then, since our species' life is precisely one of suffering, does Marx in the end reject religion? Because, as he said, "The abolition of religion as the *illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness*. To call them to give up their illusions about their conditions is to *call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore in *embryo the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo*."¹⁰

This conclusion, I think, reflects the religious practices Marx knew and saw around him—the practices of state religion, Lutheranism in Germany and the Church of England in Great Britain. Had Marx experienced the religious practices, say, of the African-American slaves in the United States he might have come to a less one-sided conclusion. Let us consider one of the “songs of suffering” sung by slaves working in the cotton and tobacco fields of the Old South. One such song, “I Got Shoes, You Got Shoes,” goes, “I got shoes / you got shoes / all God’s children got shoes. / And when we get to heaven we’ll walk all over God’s heaven, heaven, heaven / when we get to heaven we’ll walk all over God’s heaven.” What is the function of “heaven-talk” and “God-talk” in slaves giving voice to their sufferings? Is it simply pie-in-the-sky bye-and-bye talk that gives comfort to those who own and enjoy the pie here on earth?

Certainly that is how the slave owners heard it. They didn’t hear the subversive voice in that singing. They couldn’t, for it would have called into profound moral criticism their own behavior!

In their singing, as they worked barefoot in the fields of the master, the slaves gave collective voice to their protest and the cry of their own deservedness. *Heaven* is another way of talking about “how it will be when things are the way they should be.” And in heaven slaves will have shoes. The word *God* is the way the slaves assured each other, under objective circumstances of daily life that seemed to prove just the opposite, that *Heaven* is the *really real*, and that someday it will be. Because Marx had not seen and did not know of such religious practices, he concluded in the only way he could: “The more of himself man gives to God the less he has left in himself.”¹¹ But for the African-American slaves, the transcendent vision of religion helped them subvert all that was so powerfully trying to subvert their own human dignity. It was the cry of protest and the promise of a different future.

That future arrived in the 1960s when a great firestorm of protest broke out across the South. That storm of protest brought down the walls of legalized segregation and the denial of the vote to black citizens of the United States—and with it the whole way of life called “Jim Crow.” At the very heart of that rebellion was the black church. And collaborating with them in forcing a change of federal laws in Washington was the white church (both Protestant and Catholic) and Jewish synagogue councils. It was a coalition unforeseen by Karl Marx, but even more, it was beyond his ability to conceive. Also beyond his capacity to conceptualize was the important interaction between Marxist social analysis and Latin American liberation theology. Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s progressive clergy and theologians, seeking to stand in solidarity with the impoverished masses of South America, spoke of

the importance of denouncing exploitation and of announcing hope for a radically different future. Liberation ethicists borrowed heavily from Marxist analysis in decoding the rhetoric of developmentalism and insisted that (social) “liberation” and (ultimate) “salvation” constitute a single and unified hope. Here were inheritors of Marx that Marx did not foresee, but they too continue his legacy of criticizing the strategies and self-deceptions of power. They defend the widow and the orphan against the arrogance and indifference of the privileged.

There is ample historical precedence as to why a dialogue would be fruitful between Marx and religion, and the importance in that dialogue of the analysis Marx brings concerning the nature of human work and our estrangement from that experience. We are creatures, Marx claims, who are meant to be *most* at home “when we are at work,” but now “feel at home only when we are not at work.” Under the conditions of capitalism, “The more the worker exerts himself, the more powerful becomes the alien object world which he fashions against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, the less there is that belongs to him.”¹² In the very activity in which we continue to re-create and transform ourselves as a species, we experience ourselves and act as individual workers trying to make a living. Instead of enjoying the vast legacy of human tools and skills, which are both the footprints that mark our human past and the path leading toward our species’ precarious future, workers today compete against each other for jobs, and in doing so always increase the power of capital over against themselves. As Marx writes:

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed—a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital.¹³

The worker can find work only where capital has decided it can make a profit. Therefore, by working the worker continues to increase the advantage capital has in the class struggle. And once capital is de-linked from the nation state—as has happened in the late 20th century—workers lose even more power.

Marx develops three categories to inscribe and analyze the story of human work: (1) “the means of production,” (2) “the relations of production,” and (3) “the social powers of production.” The *means of production* are not simply factories or machinery, which are only the surface or visible signs of production. Instead, transnational corporations and global financial markets decide where factories will close and where they will open. And these decisions are driven by calculations of (usually short-term) profit. That is why Marx is convinced that only worker ownership and control of the means of production can put human work back into the hands of workers. Even if workers could

find a way to increase their wages, that would only be something temporary; they would remain “only better paid slaves.”¹⁴ It was a lesson that organized labor in America unfortunately did not absorb.

The second piece of the puzzle of human work Marx calls *relations of production*—the patterns of social life that are generated by work. Marx argues that in the modern era these relations of production have been reduced to two classes—capitalists and workers. To many this class analysis seems an obvious oversimplification, just as his idea of inevitable class struggle seems outmoded. After all, the revolution that Marx expected at the end of the nineteenth century did not happen. Industrial capitalism was able to produce so effectively that it generated a far larger surplus than Marx anticipated. And workers were able to organize into unions and use the political machinery of representative government to gain an increasing share of this surplus. Indeed, a whole new class appeared. Today, we call it the “middle class.”

To my mind that is a misnomer. The way to identify and name a class is to inscribe it in terms of its function and place within the larger division of labor. My preference is “the professional-managerial class.”¹⁵ It is a class made up of middle management together with lawyers, doctors, teachers, social workers, and those engaged in media, advertising, and entertainment. What is the function of this new class? Michel Foucault referred to them as “the new disciplinarians.” That is, their work is to administer, regularize, supervise, normalize, pacify (and, if unsuccessful, imprison) the working class and poor.

It is hardly a flattering description, and many of us may object. It is a perspective that deserves attention, however, because in the new global economy this professional-managerial class is beginning to shrink. There is simply no longer the surplus available in the older industrial nations, where this class first appeared and developed, to reproduce this class. As a class under assault, it needs to radically rethink its loyalties and solidarities.

This kind of class analysis is almost always missing when scholars talk about what we are talking about here—namely, religion. In the library you will find hundreds of titles listed under “religion and race” or “religion and gender,” but very few listed under “religion and social class.” Yet, how can we understand trends such as the rise of evangelical churches and the loss of membership by mainline Protestant denominations in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, or the rise of Pentecostals at the expense of the Roman Catholic Church in South America, or the rise of radical Muslims at the expense of moderate Muslims without doing global class analysis?

Religious scholarship—the work some of us do alongside other members of the professional-managerial class—needs the instruction of Marx. When it comes to how power works and disguises its workings, students of religion

need this master of suspicion. In the twenty-first century, religion promises to be a major historical force for the first time in four hundred years. Everywhere, whether it is the White House or the presidential palace in Indonesia, religious leaders are being called upon for far more than ceremonial dressing. And in places like the Indian subcontinent, religious differences have become the grounds both for war and for domestic political maneuvering.

But how religion *should* deploy its power cannot be understood without a critical analysis of how the new global “means of production” have transformed, and are powerfully transforming, the new global “relations of production.” Our most fundamental dependencies—the everyday world we rely upon and take for granted, a world where we feel safe and have a measure of control—are changing dramatically. This poses the question, in whose hands will religion decide to be a tool? To answer that question religion will need to look at what Marx calls the *social powers of production*.

It may come as a surprise that Marx, even more than the ideological defenders of capitalism, deciphered very early the way in which human labor organized by capital would produce a vast and in many respects quite positive increase in human productive capacities. Expanding transport and trade, increasing technologies and advancement in tools, the transformation of rural life by reproducing in the village the values and dreams of metropolitan culture—all of this would change forever the shape of how we humans live. Read the early pages of *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx was no Luddite. He did not want to smash the powers of the new machinery of production but to harness those powers to the interests of the workers.

In a warning still mostly missed by the followers of traditional religions, Marx pointed out that these new “social powers of production” would generate a new culture of consumerism. Increased production would demand an expanded imagination of human needs and satisfactions, an endless cornucopia of “stuff” necessary to make us happy and satisfied. But it is a satisfaction that becomes in the next moment no longer satisfying, and we need more. At the heart of this new culture would be a new ethos—a new code of behavior and respect, new patterns of hope and envy, of self-esteem and despair. “The bourgeoisie,” Marx wrote, “has played a most revolutionary role in history.”¹⁶ It has transformed the terms of human respect:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand . . . has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” . . . It has resolved personal worth into exchange value . . . [It] has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the men of science, into its paid wage laborers.¹⁷

The physician, lawyer, priest, poet and scientist—for whom do such folks now work? And what is the purpose of their work? And on what grounds do they ask the rest of us to honor them? More than 150 years ago Marx argued that global capitalism was producing a new culture, a culture that defines all value, including the value of persons, in terms of the value assigned by the market. Said directly, what Marx announced and denounced was the radical assault on the values long cherished by world religions—the intrinsic value and dignity of the human person. But his warning was not heard.

Twice before an anthology of the writings of Karl Marx on religion has been published in North America. They appeared ten years apart, in 1964 and 1974. They are *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion* (Schocken Books, 1964), with an introduction by Reinhold Neibuhr, and *On Religion: Karl Marx* (McGraw-Hill, 1974), edited by Saul K. Padover. Padover slants his selections toward the question of anti-Semitism in Marx. My interests are quite different. Neibuhr, who was my teacher, was mostly critical of Marx, accusing him of an unrealistic utopianism that a better grasp of the Christian doctrine of sin could have corrected. In contrast to that position, it is my judgment that Marx is less a poorly informed critic of religion than an important friend and dialogue partner. In this new century the values Marx fought for in terms of the dignity and destiny of human work may find their most effective advocate in world religions. But if world religions are to take up that task, they will have to undergo a fundamental self-examination. When confronted by the crisis caused by continuing world poverty compounded by environmental limits to endless economic growth, religion may be tempted to retreat into enclaves of otherworldly hope. If so, then Marx will have been proved correct in his judgment that religion suffers from an irremediable “inverted consciousness”—a consciousness that looks upon the world but sees it upside down. On the other hand, evidence from Christian liberation theology and from liberation theologies being developed by Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist scholars and activists indicates a movement toward positive engagement. Only time will tell whether world religions can come home to planet Earth—a place that may or may not have been given birth by the gods, but most assuredly gave birth to a creature which, time and again and in all its varied ways, poses to itself the question of God.

NOTES

1. See *Dialectics of Nature* (1873).
2. *The Communist Manifesto*, chapter 1, p. 144.
3. *Ibid.*, chapter 3 (not included in this book).

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4. "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," p. 171.
5. "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy," p. 84; emphasis in the original.
6. Ibid.
7. "Estranged Labor," p. 122; emphasis in the original.
8. Ibid., p. 123; emphasis in the original.
9. Ibid., p. 123; emphasis in original.
10. "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," p. 171.
11. "Estranged Labor," p. 119.
12. Ibid.
13. *The Communist Manifesto*, chapter 1, p. 149.
14. *The Communist Manifesto*, chapter 2 (not included).
15. See the essay by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," in *Between Labor and Capital*, edited by Pat Walker (1973).
16. *The Communist Manifesto*, chapter 1, p. 146.
17. Ibid., p. 146.