

Marc Roby: We are continuing our short break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. In our previous two sessions we argued that the Bible provides a Christian with his purpose, place and priorities for living and must be our standard even in the public sphere. We also argued that Christians are obligated to participate in government, at least by voting, in order to function as salt and light in the world. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to continue that discussion today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I want to discuss Karl Marx and Marxist ideology.

Marc Roby: Well, that might strike many of our listeners as a strange place to begin. Why deal with Marx and his ideology first?

Dr. Spencer: Because Marxist ideology underlies much of what is going on today. The Black Lives Matter organization, for example, is Marxist. In a youtube video<sup>1</sup> Patrice Khan-Cullors said that she and Alicia Garza, who are listed on the Black Lives Matter website<sup>2</sup> as two of the three co-founders, are both trained Marxists. In addition, there are many other manifestations in modern culture of what is, essentially, Marxist ideology.

Marc Roby: Well, certainly the modern resurgence of socialism in this country is an outgrowth of Marxist ideology. But that begs the question, how do you define Marxist ideology?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I would summarize Marx's ideology as one of conflict. He was a philosopher, a historian of sorts and an economist who primarily studied the history of economics and he considered his most important work to be *Das Kapital*, which is German for capital, meaning in this case financial assets. He was only able to finish the first volume of this work during his life and then his friend, Friedrich Engels, finished the second and third volumes from his notes after his death. In fact, Engels contributed many of the ideas that we refer to as Marxist, so much of Marx's work was really a collaboration. According to Elliot Green, out of all the books published in the social sciences before 1950, *Das Kapital* is the most cited.<sup>3</sup> He found that it was cited over 40,000 times, and that only included English translations.

Marc Roby: That's an impressive number. But why do you say Marx's ideology is one of conflict?

Dr. Spencer: Well, let me quote from the opening line of the first major section of the Communist Manifesto, which Marx co-wrote with Engels, and which summarizes his view of the history of mankind viewed from the point of view of economics. They wrote that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1noLh25FbKI>

<sup>2</sup> <https://blacklivesmatter.com/our-co-founders/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/12/what-are-the-most-cited-publications-in-the-social-sciences-according-to-google-scholar/>

fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby: Now that’s a depressing view of history. Almost every relationship is seen as one of oppression and conflict.**

Dr. Spencer: It is a very depressing view. Now, of course, we have to admit that there is *some* truth to it. Conflict has been a part of human history since the fall. There is conflict in individual personal relationships, in business relationships, between countries and so on. Governments have certainly oppressed people, employers have oppressed employees, slavery has been a common occurrence throughout human history and so on.

**Marc Roby: All of which serves to prove that we are all sinners, as the Bible says. Paul wrote in Romans 3:23 that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.<sup>5</sup>**

Dr. Spencer: That’s very true. In any event, Marx is without any doubt one of the most influential people of the past two hundred years.

He was born in 1818 in Trier, which is in the Rhineland of west central Germany, very near modern Luxembourg, which was part of Prussia at the time of Marx’s birth. His father was a lawyer and sent him to the University of Bonn to study law, but he got into trouble there and switched to the University of Berlin. Once there, he got interested in philosophy and joined a group called the “young Hegelians”.

**Marc Roby: I assume the name of the group comes from the philosopher Georg Hegel?**

Dr. Spencer: Your assumption is correct. Hegel was an objective idealist, which, according to John Frame, means that “the whole universe is characterized by thought.”<sup>6</sup> Hegel developed what is called dialectical reasoning.

**Marc Roby: Perhaps we should note that in a philosophical sense, a dialectic refers to reasoning by way of a dialogue, as made famous by Plato.**

Dr. Spencer: And again you’re right. And to be more specific about Hegel’s method, he believed that we arrive at truth through a process of trial and error. We begin any discussion, or thought process, with a proposition. That is our thesis. There is then an antithesis, which is something that seems to come from the thesis, but is contrary to it; in other words it is a negation of the thesis, which is why it is called the antithesis. Then, by backing up, if you will, and looking at the thesis and antithesis together, we arrive at a synthesis, which is a new proposition that

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<sup>4</sup> *Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, Vol. 50, pg. 419

<sup>5</sup> All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

<sup>6</sup> J. Frame, *The History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, P&R Publishing, 2015, pg. 756

corrects the errors in the thesis and antithesis. This synthesis now becomes our thesis and the process continues.

**Marc Roby: That is very abstract. Can you give a concrete example?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, although the example is still pretty abstract. Think about being. Just the bare concept of being. What does it mean? It is undefined. But we could simply say that something is *present*. That is our thesis. But thinking about that automatically causes us to ask, what is nonbeing? In other words, what is nothing? And we again see that the concept is undefined, but it means that something is *absent*. That is our antithesis. There initially seems to be no way to reconcile being and non-being, or nothing. But then comes the synthesis. We realize that nothing can *become* something, or that something can *become* nothing and we arrive at the concept of becoming as the synthesis.<sup>7</sup>

**Marc Roby: I'm not at all sure that that is helpful.**

Dr. Spencer: I understand completely, and I don't want to spend more time on it. The important thing is that this dialectical method involves looking at something and seeing that it has within itself the seeds of its own change. It is all about constant change. You go from thesis and antithesis to synthesis, which then becomes your thesis and you keep going.

Hegel viewed this as applying to history and, in fact, all of reality, since thoughts *are* reality in his view. So, to quote John Frame, "just as human thought progresses through negation and synthesis, so human history progresses through conflict and resolution. One tribe fights another, leading to a nation. Nations fight and create empires. One empire fights another, leading to a greater civilization."<sup>8</sup>

**Marc Roby: Yes, I see the origin of the conflict idea.**

Dr. Spencer: Which is all that is important for now. There is a key difference however between Hegel and Marx.

**Marc Roby: What's that?**

Dr. Spencer: Hegel was an idealist and Marx was a materialist. So, Marx's theory is sometimes called dialectical materialism, although he preferred the term historical materialism. As we saw with the brief quote from the Communist Manifesto, Marx viewed economics in terms of conflict. There is always an oppressor and an oppressed. In *Das Kapital*, he was analyzing capitalist systems, which he thought were certain to die out.

Marx wrote at the time of the industrial revolution and he broke people up into two classes. The proletariat and the bourgeoisie. He defined the proletariat as the workers who sell their labor and

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., see the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/>), or Frame, op. cit., pp 273-274

<sup>8</sup> Frame, op. cit. pg. 275

the bourgeoisie as “modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production, and employers of wage labour”<sup>9</sup>.

Let me quote the best short explanation of his ideas that I have found.

**Marc Roby: Yes, Please do.**

Dr. Spencer: In his *History of Economic Theory*, Harry Landreth wrote that “Capitalism ... contains the seeds of its own destruction, as the inevitable conflicts develop with changes in the forces of production. With the fall of capitalism a new set of relations of production will emerge, which Marx calls socialism, and socialism, in turn, finally gives way to communism.”<sup>10</sup> Landreth went on to explain that in Marx’s system, socialism means that the means of production are owned by the state. And in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx said the state is, “the proletariat organized as the ruling class.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, Marx wrote in the *Manifesto* that “the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to establish democracy.”<sup>12</sup>

**Marc Roby: Well, independent of the fact that some people today speak about democratic socialism, most people don’t associate socialism with democracy.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s true, and for good reason as we will see later. But socialism in its pure form is an economic system. Marx envisioned a democracy where the government owns all of the means of production.

But there is still in this view of socialism a vestige of capitalism, because, as Landreth writes, “economic activity is still basically organized through the use of incentive systems: rewards must still be given in order to induce men to labor.”<sup>13</sup>

**Marc Roby: So the key idea of socialism, according to Marx, is that the means of production are owned collectively, rather than being in the hands of some sort of upper class.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s the key, yes. And then the system is assumed to continue to progress and, in communism, as viewed by Marx, things are very different. Landreth writes, “Men are no longer motivated to work by monetary or material incentives, and the social classes which existed under capitalism, and to a lesser extent under socialism, have disappeared. Communism is a classless society in which the state has withered away. Under socialism each person contributes to the economic process according to his ability and receives an income according to his contribution; under communism each contributes according to his ability but consumes according to his needs.”

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<sup>9</sup> *Great Books*, op. cit., pg. 419, see fn 1

<sup>10</sup> Harry Landreth, *History of Economic Theory, Scope, Method, and Content*, Houghton Mifflin Comp., 1976, pg. 161

<sup>11</sup> *Great Books*, op. cit., pg. 428

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Landreth, op. cit., pp 161-162

**Marc Roby: That's amazing. Marx honestly believed that men's motivations will completely change, and that social classes will disappear and the state will wither away?**

Dr. Spencer: Apparently, he did. It is one of the things I find intriguing about Marx's views. It arises from his rejection of the biblical notions of sin and the authority of God to define our place. He despised religion.

**Marc Roby: That's a strong statement, can you back it up?**

Dr. Spencer: Easily. Marx wrote that religion "is the opium of the people."<sup>14</sup> By which he meant it was a tool of the oppressors used to keep the oppressed under control. He also wrote that "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness."<sup>15</sup> In other words, religion provides only an illusion of happiness according to Marx, and must be abolished in order to open the door for real happiness.

**Marc Roby: Which, on his view, would come with communism.**

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. So, you see, his view of humanity was not informed by the Bible, but he nevertheless understood that human beings are sinful, although we would never have used that word. Or, at least, he understood that human beings in power, the bourgeoisie, are sinful, since he spoke about there always being oppression of the workers, the proletariat. But he then envisioned all of this changing when the economic and governmental structures changed as a result of the proletariat coming to power. So, somehow, he thought that sin was going to magically disappear.

**Marc Roby: That's incredible.**

Dr. Spencer: It's even more incredible than just thinking oppression would go away. In the communist manifesto we read, "In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end."<sup>16</sup>

**Marc Roby: So, he envisioned heaven here on earth.**

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly what he envisioned. His philosophy was completely materialist and, as such, is fundamentally opposed to God and to Christianity. In her book *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey analyzes different worldviews in terms of how they answer three questions: First, what is the ultimate origin of everything in this universe? Second, what is wrong with the world, in

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<sup>14</sup> K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, note that in the same piece he wrote that "In the struggle against that state of affairs, criticism is no passion of the head, it is the head of passion. It is not a lancet, it is a weapon. Its object is its enemy, which it wants not to refute but to exterminate." He had started the piece off by saying, in part, that "the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism". Putting the two together, it is clear that he wanted to exterminate religion.

<sup>16</sup> *Great Books*, op. cit., pg. 428

other words, why is there all this conflict and trouble? And third, how do we fix things.<sup>17</sup> These three questions can be summarized using Christian terminology as dealing with the creation, fall and redemption.

**Marc Roby: I think that is a reasonable rubric for evaluating different worldviews. So, what does Pearcey say about Marx's worldview?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, she says that Marx's view of creation is that this universe is self-creating matter.<sup>18</sup> I would possibly disagree with the "self-creating" part of that statement, I don't know if Marx ever wrote about the origin of our universe one way or the other, but most materialists simply assume that the material universe has been around forever, or is a part of some multiverse that has been around forever. We've dealt with that idea before and it isn't important for our current discussion anyway, so let's move on to the other two aspects of a worldview.

**Marc Roby: Alright, what does Pearcey say then is Marx's view of the fall?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, obviously, having an atheistic worldview, he doesn't speak in terms of a fall. But Pearcey says that he views man's problem as the creation of private property. I think that is correct as far as it goes, but there is a little more to it. Private property wouldn't be a problem if there were no greed or envy or selfishness in this world, in other words, if there were no sin.

Marx really misses the whole point here because of his materialist, anti-God worldview. He speaks about oppression and clearly thinks it is wrong, but then never addresses that moral problem. As Pearcey writes, "Marxism assumes that human nature can be transformed simply by changing external social structures."<sup>19</sup>

**Marc Roby: And so Marx's view of redemption must also neglect any discussion of how human nature is transformed. From what you have said, it is obvious that Marx thinks there is some natural evolution in social structures that can lead to a communist utopia.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. He wrote a famous slogan, which was meant to describe the final state of mature communism. He wrote: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"<sup>20</sup>

**Marc Roby: I've heard that slogan a number of times.**

Dr. Spencer: Well we all have. Marx envisioned a society where everyone willingly used all of his or her abilities to their fullest without expecting any greater return than anyone else. He spoke of those who had greater ability as having a "natural privilege"<sup>21</sup>, in other words, if you are smarter and more talented than I am, that is just a privilege that you have been given and you

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<sup>17</sup> N. Pearcey, *Total Truth; Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, Crossway Books, 2004, pg. 134

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 136

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875, available at

[https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_Critique\\_of\\_the\\_Gotha\\_Programme.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_the_Gotha_Programme.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

should be content for me to receive just as much material wealth as you receive, even though you produce twice as much as I do.

**Marc Roby: That again sounds like a heaven on earth idea.**

Dr. Spencer: And he went even further. As we saw earlier from the Communist Manifesto, he believed that all hostilities between nations would vanish.

**Marc Roby: Wow. An end to all conflict. And all because the proletariat now owns the means of production and controls the distribution of wealth. I can think of a number of modern politicians who have drunk deeply from that well of nonsense.**

Dr. Spencer: So can I. The problem with Marx is his materialism. His diagnosis of man's problem was wrong because he didn't take sin into account. He tried to find the problem in some external circumstance rather than in man himself. And when you get the diagnosis wrong, you are bound to get the cure wrong. The paradoxical and incomprehensible thing to me is that, as I said before, he somehow thought that changing the structure of society was going to make it perfectly equitable.

But why should we assume that having the government own everything is going to solve the human problems of selfishness, greed, envy and so on? There is no logical connection whatsoever, it is just so much wishful thinking. The only solution to the sin problem is Jesus Christ.

**Marc Roby: ;Yes, I see your point. And I look forward to continuing this discussion in our next session, but we are out of time for today, so let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We'd love to hear from you.**