



MARXISM AND THE SPIRIT OF SOCIALISM: CULTURAL ORIGINS OF ANTI-CAPITALISM (1982)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL HISTORY AND THE PROBLEM OF SECULARIZATION

Ignazio Silone, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, has written strikingly about the role of moral commitment in radical theory. ‘The more Socialist theories claim to be “scientific”’, he suggests, ‘the more transitory they are; but Socialist values are permanent. The distinction between theories and values is not sufficiently recognized, but it is fundamental. On a group of theories one can found a school; but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together among men.’ When Silone gave up his Marxism in the 1930s, he became a devout Christian, but he remained an ardent socialist throughout his life. The juxtaposition of these faiths – Marxism, Christianity, and socialism – is what this essay is all about.

That Marxism contains significant value commitments does not in any way differentiate it from other general social scientific theories. Every theory has ideological dimensions, certain a priori commitments which allow it to evaluate, in the moral terms of ‘ought’, the empirical facts which record what the world ‘is’. To miss this necessary elision of facts and values, as Raymond Aron does when he condemns Marxism as a ‘fallacious myth’ which – in contrast to sociology – intercedes between the ‘real and ideal’, is to take the easy way out. What is unique about Marx’s theory is not *that* it contains values but *how* it does so. Marx raised the art of ideologizing to a level of grandeur and profundity it has never attained since. Marx was not just a scientist but the creator of an enormous social and spiritual force. He founded an intellectual

school but he created, too, an utterly new 'world-historical' movement with its own culture and civilization. Indeed, I would like to suggest that the ideological power of Marx's work can be understood only if he is seen as the founder of the first great secular world religion. Marxism has provided a new system of meaning and new sources of motivation for almost half of the world's people. This sociological fact testifies less to Marx's explanatory prescience than to his prophetic and religious truth.

The notion that a modern scientific theory may have a 'religious truth' will undoubtedly seem to many readers like a contradiction in terms, as will the very phrase 'secular world religion'. Yet these paradoxes lead directly to the central theoretical question that underlies this essay: the relation between our 'modern' world and earlier 'traditional' ones or, more specifically, the relationship between religious and secular life.

Sociology and history, and, indeed, the modern intellectual disciplines taken as a whole, have lived under the debilitating illusion that post-religious society is ontologically different from the religious social orders of earlier times. Now this illusion, like most powerful intellectual and historical mistakes, emerges from a central and valid insight: human societies have changed, they have become more accessible to human control and more understandable in terms of purely human reason. For most of human history, men and women lived in a 'cosmological' world in which earthly things were integrated with and explained by a supernatural order. This 'closed universe' rested on a dualistic pattern of thought that marked large areas of the human and natural worlds 'off limits'. The tremendous changes which began in the early modern period of European history – religious, intellectual, cultural, and social developments – allowed an 'open universe' to emerge for the first time in human history. Rather than an integrated cosmology, men understood that the natural and social worlds operated according to impersonal laws, that different sectors of social life and nature were subject to enormously different kinds of control, and that neither the forces which controlled these worlds nor the human experience in each of them could be integrated in a metaphysically meaningful way. In the course of this development, dualistic thinking foundered: the world of nature and men appeared increasingly to be a natural one, and supra-natural forces gave up their central place in the universe.

This reliance on natural laws and the increasing emphasis on man's ability to exert control through humanly created institutions and structures led to patterns of intellectual understanding which asserted that the closed and open worlds had nothing in common. This belief emerged full blown in the Enlightenment and became analytically specified in the guiding dichotomies of 19th-century thought: *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*, feudalism/capitalism, religious/secular, sacred/profane. This dichotomous mode of understanding has so continued to dominate intellectual life in the 20th century that even the thinkers who have done most to illuminate the structures of premodern religious thought have succumbed to it. Max Weber, who demonstrated that

religion was essential in the very creation of the modern world and who devised the most powerful categories for analyzing this creative process, believed that the 'iron cage' of industrial life had driven spiritual concerns into the corners and shadows of the modern world. Claude Lévi-Strauss, who more than any other contemporary thinker convinced intellectuals that traditional people lived in a mythical universe, and who developed some of the most sophisticated and supple techniques for understanding this mythical structure, feels much the same way: the 'hot' world of mythical life has given way to the 'cool' of instrumental calculation and material force.

I would like to suggest that this radically dichotomous understanding of the history and nature of the modern world is itself a mythical and irrational construction, an intellectual story devised, unconsciously, to give man courage and succor in the face of the existential anxiety and social danger of the human-centered world he now faces. The need for this myth reflects the very real empirical changes which have transpired, yet its very existence testifies to the fundamental continuities in human experience and social structure which belie its intellectual truth.

The structure of human society has not, in fact, radically and completely altered over the last 500 years. To the contrary, if we are going to understand ourselves and the world around us we must see that there are, indeed, fundamental continuities and similarities. Sociologists like Durkheim and Parsons have demonstrated these similarities at the most general and abstract level, arguing that all social systems throughout history have exhibited a fundamentally similar form. In sociological terms, there is never any completely 'rational' or 'real' basis for beliefs, no matter how scientific and anti-supernatural: there are only historically relative sets of beliefs that are believed to be true by the members of a particular society. Institutionalized beliefs, whether ostensibly religious or secular, seem to be 'valid' only because processes of socialization establish them as unconscious references for personal identity, and serious deviation from institutionalized beliefs – even scientific ones – is subject to forceful and persistent social control aimed at re-establishing internalization. The earlier world dominated by religious belief, then, was organized by the same basic social system processes as the world today: it was simply the contents of that system's beliefs which were different. Secularism, therefore, refers not to the withdrawal or elimination of nonrational belief and unconscious, affective control but rather to the fact that a different set of beliefs has become the object of internalization and social control.

The case for the continuity of secular and religious worlds can, however, be argued in a more direct and more historically specific way. In the essay which follows, and here I follow more the example of Weber and, especially, his historical contemporary Jellinck, I wish to argue that the essential cultural patterns of modern societies derive from those of the earlier religious world, that the 'advanced' and human-centered nature of contemporary belief rests upon the earlier internal evolution of religious life, and that the central themes

of secular ideology are, fundamentally, the most 'advanced' religious ideas stripped of their metaphysical form.

What better subject for such an investigation than Marxism, an intellectual system and a social movement that asserts its resolutely anti-religious humanism, its purely anti-normative materialism, and its completely scientific status? In what follows I will argue that the most essential structures of this quintessentially modern theory must be linked to religious history and to the contemporary necessities of maintaining a secular faith. Only if the intimate relationship of Christianity, socialism, and Marxism is understood can we fully understand the modern world that they themselves have done so much to make.

CHAPTER 2: THE DIALECTIC OF RELIGIOUS RATIONALIZATION AND HUMAN EMPOWERMENT

To understand how this simple and compact moral system has been able to transform meaning and motivation on such a massive scale, Marxism must be placed in the broadest possible cultural context. This context can be nothing less than the history of world religions, their internal character and their evolutionary development.

The earliest human societies were small, tightly integrated communities where sacred things were thoroughly intertwined with the world of nature and everyday life. In this 'fused' and organic world the gods were no more than the alter egos of human beings and, as such, seemed to be immediately accessible to human intervention and desire. Yet, ironically, this easy interpenetration of sacred and profane was inseparable from its dialectical opposite, which in fact it helped produce: men felt themselves ruled by fate in its natural as well as its supernatural forms. Fused with the things, the people, and the nature of this world, the spirits of early societies could give man no leverage with which to separate and differentiate himself from the domination of the world around him. It is not surprising, therefore, that the tribal and band societies in which animism and naturism flourished were also societies in which the division of labor, and of power, responsibility, and prestige, were thoroughly intertwined with and determined by kinship – the most 'natural' and 'organic' form of legitimation upon which a social system can draw. With the development of agricultural surplus, when these simple societies became more class divided, religious fusion and kinship criteria worked together to legitimate the new and unequal class systems.

Religious development can be viewed as moving away from this early picture in every respect. Religious life was, in Max Weber's famous phrase, gradually rationalized. Images of God became more distinct and myths about divine action more self-consciously codified and systematized. The divine world became distinctively separated and eventually far distant from the operation of earthly society, so much so that elaborate ceremonies of supplication, sacrifice

and homage were necessary to bridge the distance between the sacred and profane. Yet the ironic dialectic of earthly and divine power persisted. Even as the gods were given more differentiated and systematic authority, human beings acquired increasing power to control and alter their material, social and cultural circumstances. In the early stages of religious development this empowerment certainly was not striking. In highly stratified agricultural societies and imperial bureaucracies like Egypt, for example, privileged groups were still considered intimately related to divine power, and as a result kinship and blood continued to legitimate the exploitative distribution of earthly goods. As social and cultural development continued, however, the results of the changing relationship between sacred and profane became more and more evident.

With the enormous cultural innovations that occurred throughout the world's great civilizations in the first millennium BC, there emerged new and dramatically more rationalized forms of religious life and organization. In the great 'historic religions' of Confucianism, Buddhism and Judaism, the world of the gods became significantly more differentiated and separated from everyday life. The most significant and far-reaching transformation, of course, occurred with the Judaic breakthrough to monotheism. Here the disparate godly images of pantheism were concentrated into a single, all powerful divine source. This Hebraic god was unnamed and relatively bereft of the anthropomorphizing features that had personalized and humanized early divinities. Corresponding to this religious rationalization and depersonalization, the Hebrew god operated in accordance with an elaborately systematized set of commandments and laws. Through these laws he apparently subjected his followers to fantastic control, and certainly the tension between this world and the next greatly increased.

Yet, once again, this seeming empowerment and elevation of the divine world produced, simultaneously, its opposite. As the Jewish god Jahwe was sharply differentiated from the world of nature and things, so could the Jews become relatively independent of their 'naturally' given surroundings and, in this way, more capable of changing them. As the impersonal Jahwe ruled through an elaborate legal system, so could his followers subject their own world to rational legal codes, a form of conscious social control that increased individual and collective responsibility. This highly differentiated and relatively impersonal religious order also allowed ancient Israel to create a community solidarity that transcended its internal divisions. This solidary 'people', combined with the heightened emphasis on responsibility and control, provided the audience and the motivation for the most significant Judaic cultural innovation of all, the rise of this-worldly religious prophecy.

With the uniquely universalistic ethical god as their point of reference and the 'people' as their source of charismatic leverage, the Israeli prophets became the first influential political leaders in history to persistently and systematically criticize the basic authorities of their own societies. On the eve of

Israel's destruction by foreign powers, the prophets utilized their independent sacred leverage to condemn the religious bad faith of the Israeli people. More importantly, however, they used their autonomous religious prestige to condemn the moral and political transgressions which, they believed, had created the social injustices and inequalities that Israeli leadership had gradually accommodated and which the more rationalized and critical religion of Jahwe had only ambiguously supported. 'Woe to him,' Jeremiah cried, 'that makes his neighbor serve him without pay and gives him not his wages.' Amos thundered, 'Let Justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a perennial stream.' And Isaiah warned the rich and powerful, 'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! In mine ears said the lord of Hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant.'

These judgments of the prophets against their social orders, carried out in the name of a transcendent god and his universal justice, would have been unthinkable in societies with less rationalized religions, where the divine and sacred orders were more fused. The Israeli nation passed from the historical scene, but prophetic culture – embodied in the Old Testament – proved to be a turning point in Western history.

Christianity was built upon the heritage of Judaism and on the closely related cultural universalism and naturalism of ancient Greece as well. The unprecedented religious differentiation that Christianity produced was without doubt the single most significant factor in separating the path of Western development from that of other world civilizations. Its spiritual universalism allowed it to separate, more than any other mass religion in history, membership in the religious community from political, ethnic and economic position, and every member of this Christian community was, in principle, guaranteed full citizen rights in the Church itself. The liberating mandates of the abstract Christian god reinforced the rule of law and more rationalized behavior in various spheres of social life, particularly as it became reinforced – and affected in turn – by the social structures of the Roman empire.

The historically distinctive character of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition provided cultural leverage for equally unprecedented social developments. The city states which emerged in the 11th century and which reached their glory in the Italian Renaissance were far more inclusive and egalitarian than any earlier urban forms, a fact that can be linked directly to the liberating independence from kinship and other ascriptive ties that Christianity inspired. The anti-authoritarian and enterprising spirit that inspired the political struggles and economic achievements of these Renaissance cities can similarly be traced to the increased demands for self-control and responsibility which were intrinsic parts of the Christian faith.

Yet Christianity was, nevertheless, fundamentally comprised by the traditionalistic social structures of its time. European feudalism and patrimonialism

emphasized familial ties, personalistic relationships, and deference to authoritative demands. Christianity adopted to such pressures in a variety of ways. Religious grace for the masses became mediated by a vast religious bureaucracy which demanded earthly powers and monopolized religious control, and those who had gained wealth and power outside the Church were rewarded with privileged access to grace and power within it. Corresponding with these changes, the most spiritually committed practitioners of Christianity withdrew from practical activities into monasticism, a form of other-worldly asceticism which allowed the tension between sacred and profane to be relaxed for the masses who did not withdraw from the world and which, simultaneously, allowed this practical world to remain fundamentally unchanged. While the religious 'virtuosos' committed to a more rigorous asceticism were shunted into monasteries and withdrawn from the centers of commerce and power, in the religious lives of lower-class people magic and paganism powerfully undermined the rigors and demands of more transcendental faith.

The compromises and the principles of the Judaic-Christian tradition were reflected in the narrative myths that informed its sacred books, the Old and New Testaments. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed an integrated and spontaneous existence in which they did not have to subject themselves to godly administration or harsh, impersonal judgment. After they had committed the sin of disobedience and had gained knowledge, however, they were thrust outside of this magic garden into a world of suffering and domination. Adam was condemned to work only barren ground and to eat only in the sweat of his face; Eve was condemned to the sorrow of childbirth and to the absolute rule of man. In this tragically dualistic world sacred and profane had been radically split asunder. Human beings had to exercise continuous vigilance over their corporeal behavior, and in order to atone for the sins of disobedience and knowledge had to subject themselves at every point to the greater wisdom of their inscrutable god. If they could successfully regulate their lives and separate themselves from earthly demands, the people of God eventually would be saved through an apocalyptic event. The Old Testament promised an everlasting Heaven on earth, the New Testament a thousand year reign of God on earth, the 'Millennium'.

The messianic element in Judeo-Christianity profoundly reveals its transcendental character and, in addition, its capacity for world transformation along universalistic lines. 'Apocalypse' was derived from the Greek word for revelation, and its pivotal place in Judeo-Christian myth represents the enormous anti-worldly power accorded the differentiated and autonomous God. Moreover, in striking contrast to non-Western visions of a utopian future, this millennial vision is imbedded in a temporal perspective that is linear and historical. If mankind works and struggles with sufficient diligence and purity, salvation will come in the historical future. This belief in an earthly and historical salvation drastically increased the tension between heaven and earth, for it imbedded the promise of an imminent, this-worldly salvation in a transcendent

anti-worldly source. In so doing, it gave to social (as against earthly) conditions the possibility of other-worldly sanction and support. This millennial vision demonstrates, once again, the dialectical relationship that exists in religious evolution between divine rationalization and human empowerment.

The Reformation, particularly in the Calvinist and Puritan versions which emerged in the late 16th and 17th centuries, represented a massive protest against the 'compromise formations' which had emerged within the traditional Church. Revitalizing the egalitarian and anti-authoritarian pressures that were encoded by Christian principles, Protestantism demanded lay participation in worship, congregational rather than hierarchical organization of the Church, and universal access to grace regardless of earthly position. This insistence on religious purity raised the tension between sacred and profane virtually to the breaking point, and in this way Calvinism and Puritanism brought to its logical conclusion the dialectic of divine rationalization and earthly empowerment that operated throughout the history of world religion.

Weber called Puritanism the religion of 'this-worldly asceticism' because of its fanatical emphasis on practical 'works' over personal and intimate contact with God, a contact which would have compromised the utterly impersonal and transcendental power of the Puritan God. The Puritans practiced a ferociously activist and practical vocation in this world in the service of the other. They were in this world but not of it. Because the Puritan God was too transcendent and omniscient to manifest himself through the artifices of miracle and magic, so he could be perceived only indirectly, through the efforts of earthly transformation. Although he was too distant and inscrutable to be reached through inner communion, the disciplined and fearless mastery and control of this world would, ironically, create the manifestation of God on earth. Thus, while the Puritan could do nothing for personal reward, he was inspired to engage in social activity that produced stupendous and historically unprecedented human results. It is not surprising that the Reformation was a time of enormous millennial hope and prophecy. As people worked harder than ever before to realize God's will, the belief in the imminent divinization of earthly society grew apace. The Apocalypse would come. and it would be created by a resurgence of human will and control.

While the millennium did not arrive, a far-reaching break with traditional society did occur. The painful tension between other-worldly commitments and this-worldly commands produced unheralded transformations in every sphere of social life. Most directly, these human achievements occurred within the realm of Protestantism itself. The voluntaristic and disciplining effects of Puritanism on the spirit of modern capitalism have been well documented since Weber's pioneering studies. Less well known, perhaps, is the impetus that the Reformation gave to natural science, as Puritans sought out the impersonal pattern of God's logic in nature itself. The individualism and impersonality of the Puritan ethos also rationalized the legal order and made it a more effective and flexible instrument for social change. More importantly for our purposes,

the challenge to earthly authority unleashed by Protestantism had profound political repercussions. The very term 'revolution' was not coined until the 16th century, and the first large-scale revolutionary attempts were directly inspired by the Protestant faith. In the late 16th century, a radical disciple of Luther, Thomas Munzer, created the Anabaptist sect and launched a massive peasant movement demanding the abolition of private property, the levelling of class divisions, and the end of independent political authority. In the early 17th century, Puritan intellectuals played a pivotal role in the English revolution which created the first national democratic structures and institutionalized the first modern forms of political activism. This 'revolution of the saints' spawned a number of radical political-religious sects, like the Diggers and Levellers, whose members' demands for complete economic equality and community carried the congregationalist and democratic implications of Puritanism to its ultimate extreme.

This exquisite balance between other-worldly commitments and this-worldly action could not be maintained. The fantastic pressure for practical achievement in the service of transcendental ends, the enormous empowerment of humanity in the name of an all powerful supra-human force had, eventually, to undermine extra-human and supernatural force itself. The dialectic of divine elevation and human development could not continue past this point. If the process of human empowerment produced by the rationalization and internal development of religious life were to proceed, it would have to eliminate the religious side of this cultural movement. For this reason, the highest development of religion led quite naturally to the initial phases of secularization. But this secularism was not the undisciplined indulgent pragmatism which as traditionalism or paganism had been the principal antagonist to religious rationalization. This secularism, rather, entailed the translation of rationalized religious culture into the terms of everyday nonreligious life. If religion lost its worldly power, it did so in the service of further transforming the world.

By making the divine completely transcendent, Protestantism had 'disenchanted' the world. This disenchantment meant that for the first time in history the world was, in principle, fully accessible to purely human insight and control. Disenchantment, then, inspired not only the practical and naturalistic action of Protestantism but also, more indirectly, the rule of reason and rationalism in regard to earthly things. At first this rule of reason – so clearly manifest even in the 'administrative science' of counter-Reformation states like absolutist France – was exercised in the name of God himself. For the most advanced intellectuals of the 17th and 18th centuries, however, 'God' gradually receded from his position as the active, anthropomorphic shaper of the universe; he came to be viewed, instead, more as a starting mechanism. Although these intellectuals acknowledged that some divinity was still responsible for the initial creation of the universe, they believed that 'natural laws' rather than religious ones were responsible for the continuing patterns of natural and social life.

This development, it should be clear, was but one step removed from the impersonal, highly rationalized structure of Protestant belief. It had, after all, been the English Protestant John Locke who had produced in the 17th century the first political theory of natural rights. Yet with the emergence of religious 'deism' and the theory of natural rights the dualistic image created by the division between a literal heaven and earth began to dissolve. This withdrawal of God from sole regulator to starting mechanism was called Deism because it did not imply a disbelief in the existence of God per se. What secularized Deism did imply was that 'efficient causes' were natural ones. The object of religious and supernatural faith became relegated to a corner of the universe which did not have effective control of the natural world. Yet this natural world was still a world of impersonal laws, laws which operated with all the power and determinism formerly allowed to the laws of God. The structures refined by Puritan consciousness – the sanctity of individual conscience and the significance of self-discipline, the commitment to normative universalism and critical rational control – remained firmly in place. They had now, however, become part of this world alone.

The French and American revolutions at the close of the 18th century signalled the initial triumph of this secular instantiation of religious faith. The natural rights theory which emanated from John Locke's Protestantism had travelled across the Channel to inspire the deistic and more thoroughly naturalistic democratic philosophy of the Enlightenment. The French revolutionaries held traditionalistic authorities to a firm and unyielding standard of universalism, a standard which motivated them to act confidently and forcefully against all earthly power that was deemed corrupt. The apocalyptic sensibilities of the revolution, moreover, demonstrated clearly their debt to the millennial culture of Protestantism – the expectations for total transformation and earthly fulfillment, the accelerating, frantic pace of revolutionary change, and, finally, the mass violence and destruction that ensued in the final effort to realize the Revolution's promise in the chaos of the 'last days'. Though the laws and promise were now ostensibly purely natural and worldly ones, their transcendent, impersonal, and fundamentally 'anti-worldly' quality could not be in doubt. It was the 'revelation' of this transcendental yet practical reason that inspired the revolutionaries' heroic efforts, just as it was the institutionalization of a naturalized kingdom of God on earth that mandated the radical nature of their revolutionary goals.

By the end of the 18th century, the stage was set for movements of this-worldly transformation to occur in purely secular form and in the name of reason alone. The cultural and personal structures that religious rationalization had produced could now enter the world on their own terms, without the succor of an explicitly supra-natural source. From this time forward there ensued a series of social and cultural movements of earth-shaking significance, the reverberations from which continue to rock the world to this day. Before these post-religious movements for world transformation could get fully under

way, however, a new secular world religion had to be born. It was socialism, a resolutely secular set of ideas for understanding the world, that would provide the system of faith necessary to change and transform it.

CHAPTER 3: INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE SPIRIT OF SOCIALISM

Max Weber and his followers realized that the social movement from feudalism to capitalism demanded a spiritual movement as well. The new grouping of landless and relatively capital poor middle-class people experienced discontent and anomie; they sought a world view more relevant to their emerging position than the aristocratic ethos of honor and deference. Puritanism provided just such a cultural framework. It answered the group's subjective needs for increased order and control and also gave them transcendental leverage for changing the world in a way that improved their structural position and helped alleviate the strains this situation had created.

What Weberians have not so clearly understood is that the same kind of analysis applies to the next phase of social development as well, that is, to the situation of the lower classes in the transition from early entrepreneurial capitalism to the more organized industrialism of the welfare state, social democracy, and communism. This transition also involved fundamental structural dislocation and the increasingly strained position of a major disprivileged group. In this later case, however, the strain occurred in the capitalist period itself rather than in early modern society, and the disprivileged group was the 'working class' of artisans and unskilled workers rather than the middle class of traders and capitalists. Just as the cultural life of the middle classes had to be transformed if the emerging capitalist order were to be successfully established, so the ideological milieu of these lower-class groups had to be radically altered if a new, more organized and integrated industrial society were to succeed. The spiritual life of the artisan and industrial classes had to be revitalized if these groups were to become active and critical enough to successfully challenge the early capitalist order. Only by so 'reforming' themselves could they survive as a class, and, ironically, only if they survived as a strong, creative, and fighting class could the social system in which they were enmeshed be sufficiently transformed so it, too, could survive and flourish.

There must, then, be a spirit of socialism which corresponds sociologically with the spirit of capitalism and which historically is its counterpart and successor. Whereas the spirit of capitalism drew upon Puritanism, the spirit of socialism directly draws upon religion only partly or not at all. Yet in an indirect way the spirit of socialism relies completely on the rationalization of religious life, for it is inspired by the universalistic culture of critical reason and this-worldly transformation that was this nationalization's secular legacy. Armed with the socialist spirit, the working classes could adapt to the structural dislocations of the emerging modern order, but they could

also in part transcend them. In acting firmly and critically against the forces that challenged and oppressed them, moreover, these reformed lower-class groups, like the Puritans before them, simultaneously transformed their own social status. At a minimum they gained self-respect and a more secure and respectable social position; at the most, they revolutionized their societies and gained, at least temporarily, a new ruling position.

The emergence of Puritanism corresponded with fundamental changes in social structure and culture. So, too, did the emergence of socialism. The former historical equation reads as follows: Puritanism equals middle-class position plus middle-class citizenship plus religious rationalization. The more recent historical equation reads: socialism equals lower-class economic position plus working-class political rights plus this-worldly secularism. The particular spirit of socialism that emerged in a specific historical situation depended not only upon the relative alienation of lower-class groups but also on the situation of the middle-class intellectual groups which formulated and propagated this new secular faith. Working classes were more or less isolated from – oppressed by – the cultural and structural centers of society; their response to this oppression, however, also depended on their relationship to cultural traditions that encouraged creative transformation and this-worldly control, traditions carried more or less successfully by middle-class intellectuals. It is these multiple and interdependent relationships that we will pursue below.

The French Revolution was an event that symbolized the breakdown of the religiously dualistic world view on a massive scale. It was also an event with tremendous political and social ramifications throughout the Western world. The Revolution and the outbreak of democratic revolutions which followed in its wake created a widespread sense of instability and an often overwhelming feeling of rapid social and cultural change. When these political events were combined with the accelerating processes of industrialization, urbanization, and secularization, it is no wonder that the period from the 1790s through the 1840s marked a time of anxiety and instability unprecedented in European history.

The artisan experienced a generalized anxiety because of the threat that technical innovation posed to his special skills and his social prestige. For the newly arrived, unskilled rural immigrant to the city, there was the utter insecurity that, as Friedrich Engels himself wrote in 1845, was ‘far more demoralizing than poverty’. Yet members of the middle class were hardly immune; the shifting and unstable social order of the early 19th century threatened their own social status and legitimate expectations for a future life. Emerging within such a thoroughly Christianized culture, it is not surprising that these strains and anxieties would lead to widespread fears that the last days of the world were near and to millennial hopes for divine intervention and change.

This state of anxiety and expectation is illustrated in a statement made in 1832 by the famous English Headmaster of Rugby School, Thomas Arnold. ‘I believe that “the day of the Lord” is coming’, Arnold wrote, ‘that is, the termination

of one of the great [ages] of the human race.' The contemporary period, he continued, must be placed in the historical perspective of earlier periods of social chaos and divine imminence. 'The termination of the Jewish Age in the first century, and of the Roman in the fifth and sixth, were each marked by the same concurrence of calamities, wars, tumults, pestilences, earthquakes, etc., all marking the time of one of God's peculiar seasons of visitation.' The result, even for this prestigious member of the supposedly secure middle class, was a fearful foreboding and a feeling of imminent change. 'My sense of the evil of the times, and to what prospects I am bringing up my children, is overwhelmingly bitter. All the moral and physical world appears to announce the coming of "the great day of the Lord" – that is a period of fearful visitation, to terminate the existing state of things – whether to terminate the whole existence of the human race, neither man nor angel knows.'

The dual experience of oppression and estrangement combined with the perception of imminent and apocalyptic change were sufficient in themselves to create a certain alienation from established institutions and roles. Independent cultural interpretation was still necessary, however, if these inchoate feelings were to assume some specific and patterned form. If this canalization were performed by explicitly religious intellectuals, the integration of these industrializing societies would obviously be enhanced. Yet the possibilities for such religious control depended upon the flexibility, responsiveness, and autonomy of the various religious establishments. It was precisely these qualities, however, which institutionalized religion did not possess.

By the early 19th century strong alliances existed in every European country between powerful economic and political elites and the leaders of central religious institutions. This religious alliance was, in the first place, a question of power, money, and prestige. It coincided with the 'restoration' of aristocratic authority and anti-democratic rule in France, with the defeat of the Napoleonic challenge in Germany, and with the conservative reaction to the French Revolution in England. Yet this traditionalist alliance had significant internal religious dimensions as well. The established religions of England, France, and Germany emphasized the external and formal aspects of religious behavior. They established bureaucratic structures which mediated the relationship between individuals and divine grace and which encouraged a deferential attitude toward earthly authority.

Finally, each of these churches strongly discouraged 'enthusiasm' and sought to mute millennial hopes for the imminent appearance of God on earth. Because of such spiritual routinization, the established churches were unable to channel the great outpouring of emotion and anxiety that characterized their time, much less creatively develop new spiritual and cultural solutions. This traditionalism and intransigence set rigid conditions for continued intellectual and working-class loyalty, and in doing so it set the stage for the rise of more secular ideologies less attached to established thought and institutions. By far the most important of these ideologies was socialism.

Taken as an abstract idea, socialism is an ideology of radical equality and community which transforms the formal idea of natural rights into a substantive natural right to the product of one's labor and, by implication, to full inclusion in the societal community. The notion that all value is derived from labor – the 'labor theory of value' – had first been proposed by the English Protestant John Locke, and the socialist proposal of the worker's 'Right to the Whole Product' merely offered a new historical content to the Puritan emphasis on the pursuit of grace through mastery and 'works' rather than through contemplation and faith. When carried by reformist groups or institutionalized as a legitimate strand in national political ideology, socialism need not, therefore, imply radical challenge and revolutionary intent. To the degree it becomes the ideology of one sector of society over another, however, such radicalization can easily take hold. As the allocation of religious grace – the fruits of good works – becomes identified with the working class alone, the activist and millennial structure of socialism manifests itself in a more destructive and anti-institutional way. For such militant and class-oriented socialism, the upper class represents the forces of anti-Christ, an indolent leisure class living off the workers' 'surplus value' and supporting a system that denies the just reward of honest work. In this radical case, socialism becomes an ideology of extraordinary 'deviance' and antagonism to the centers of society, an ideology that utilizes for its own historical purposes the rationality, transcendence, and transformatory power that once emanated from the culture of the center itself.

Whether the spirit of socialism reaches this extreme ferocity or remains a relatively moderate critical faith obviously depends upon the culture and structure of its milieu. In a society where lower classes and dissenting intellectuals have real access to the dominant culture, the critical, anti-laissez-faire ideology of the regime's socialist opponents may be so moderate as not to appear socialist at all, though it will, in fact, still partake of the basic tenets of that reformist faith. By contrast, in societies where challengers find no leverage in the dominating cultural and political apparatus, a more militant form of socialism eventually will emerge. In the former case, where critical access is more easily granted, the socialism which emerges will have a distinctively ethical and moralistic hue, for in these situations the workers and intellectuals have not had to separate themselves completely from national religious life. In the latter case, however, the spirit of socialism will take on an increasingly materialist and anti-spiritual form, for in denying to working-class and intellectual dissidents the resources and legitimation of the dominant culture, the authorities have cut socialism off from religion itself. It is thus that Marxism, a self-consciously materialist and militant form of socialism, was created and nurtured by the very societies it sought to overthrow.

**CHAPTER 4: FROM MORAL REFORMISM TO
MATERIALIST REVOLUTION: SPIRITUAL VARIATIONS
IN AMERICA, ENGLAND, FRANCE AND GERMANY**

In the 50-year period under discussion, from the 1790s to the 1840s, intellectuals and lower-class people in every Western nation experienced a jolting sense of disruption in their social and cultural worlds. We have discussed the growth of millennial expectations that accompanied this increasing anxiety and strain among both middle and lower classes. We might mention that the emergence of the passionate and utopian strains of Romantic thought should be considered another manifestation of this movement. In the literature and philosophy of every nation Romantic intellectuals demanded the renewal of the spirit and the revitalization of emotional enthusiasm. These demands were encompassed, moreover, in a framework which was clearly derived from the millennial worldview of Christian tradition, and they made world transformation and the Kingdom of God on earth the keynotes of their prophetic warnings and utopian hopes. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake in England, Schelling, Fichte, Goethe, and Hegel in Germany, Prud'hon, Fourier, Sand, and Lamartine in France – all these Romantic thinkers closely interwove religious and secular themes in their critical attacks on established institutions and in their calls for the revival of the living spirit in community life. The Romantic emphasis on spirit and feeling responded to the routinization and distance of established religious life, and in its critical form Romanticism promoted the egalitarian community of all believers that was such an essential element in the secularization of 'Protestant' faith. The enormous impact and influence of Romanticism, its symbiotic relationship with religion and with critical social movements, suggests that it must be viewed as one part of the secular 'Protestantizing' development I have tried to describe, that intellectual and cultural movement which translated this-worldly activism into the secular and critical ideology of socialism in response to the social and spiritual crises of the day.

The question remains: how were these movements of emotional and cultural estrangement canalized by specific cultural patterns and institutionalized by concrete social structures and movements? Some initial generalizations were proposed at the end of the preceding chapter. These will be elaborated by examining a range of actual historical situations. The socialist, egalitarian critique of early capitalism assumed a reformist position to the degree that lower classes and intellectuals were not fundamentally disjoined from participating in the central culture and structures of their societies. Since intellectuals were the ones who formulated the ideology of protest, the position of intellectuals becomes, in itself, particularly significant, though their position is obviously not unrelated to the position of other groups. If intellectuals had relative autonomy from the centers of power, yet at the same time relative control over its basic ideological processes, their socialism would be a modulated one. This combination of relative distance and relative control or access allowed intel-

lectuals to respond sympathetically and critically to social dislocation without being forced to step completely outside the cultural framework that linked them to legitimate authority and to dominant religious and cultural themes.

Such a position of integration and dissent could be achieved only under certain unique circumstances. In the 16th and 17th centuries the national intellectuals' group had to be thoroughly and radically 'reformed'. In such cases of successful and thorough reformation, critical and militant religious intellectuals carried the day against the traditionalistic, relatively other-worldly spokesmen of Catholic and aristocratic inclination. This transformation was facilitated by, and itself promoted, the ideological conversion of dominant political and economic elites, and in so doing it guaranteed that these critical intellectuals would share in the basic processes of political and economic power. In this way, the critical and activist framework of radical Protestantism could become the basic cultural resource for very different structural arrangements. Though it supplied quasi-legitimation for authoritarian structures, it could also be drawn on for social change and conflict. Total refutation and reformulation was unnecessary, since a critical and socialist ideology was, in fact, merely a more radical variation of the ideological consensus committed to 'reform'.

In England and America, where Puritanism had thoroughly revolutionized cultural life, the 'traditional' values were indeed largely, though not of course completely, activist and transformatory. By contrast, in Germany, despite its historical distinction of being the home of the Reformation, intellectuals were intimately involved with authoritarian and feudal political and economic relationships. Their culture was more 'traditional', and their participation in reform demanded radical revision and anti-religious reform. France presents an in-between case. Authoritarian structures maintained a powerful official culture of religious traditionalism and so produced a radical and completely this-worldly counter-culture. Because this culture developed before the 19th century, however, it provided a highly accessible form of leverage for dissenting groups in the early capitalist period.

These variations, we shall see, help explain the relationship between established religion and reform, between popular religion and socialism, and ultimately between reformist socialism and its Marxian variant. We turn now to a more detailed discussion of each case.

America

Alone among all the different Western nations America did not institutionalize a significant, sustained, and self-conscious socialist movement. The qualification 'self-conscious' is significant, for there can be no doubt that the militant and often violent struggles of the American working class, and the ideological innovations of their intellectual leaders and of middle-class reformers more generally, produced a cultural pattern that diverged strikingly from the capitalist individualism of *laissez faire*. This much more egalitarian

pattern placed the traditional American emphasis on activism and control in a more corporatist and collectivist framework; it formed the backbone of the welfare state and sustained the tradition of lower-class political protest throughout the 20th century in American society. On these grounds various students of the American workers' movement have made the equation that Americanism equals socialism. But it is precisely the reasons for this equation that interest us here.

American was founded by the most radical wing of the Puritan movement. The elites that inevitably developed with national growth certainly produced conservative variations upon Puritanism's rational, individualistic activism. Yet no feudal elites of church or estate existed to support a truly traditionalistic and reactionary ideology, with Southern slave society an outrageous but still only partial exception. Democratic and egalitarian intellectuals, moreover, were at the very heart of the revolutionary movement which marked America's national independence. Because of the reformed character of American religion, and the central yet independent position of American intellectuals, critical and reformist responses to the rapid social changes of the early 19th century could be produced within the dominant cultural and religious frameworks rather than outside of them.

One extremely significant response, indeed, was the nationwide wave of religious 'revivals' which began just after the turn of the 19th century. The religious ideas of this 'great Awakening' were formulated by middle-class intellectuals, but lower-class artisans and small farmers were central to the movement. The revivals, with their increased emphasis on participation and enthusiasm, represented a sharp break with the hierarchy and routine of more traditional religion. Initial opposition by older and more established political and cultural elites rapidly gave way, with the result that by 1850 the cultural milieu of northern and western America had been substantially 'reformed' – democratized and respiritualized – without the creation of fundamental and lasting antagonisms and certainly without the creation of serious anti-religious groups.

With the onset of industrialization in the latter part of the 19th century, therefore, the secular ideology of the American working class had no need to depart radically from the dominant national culture, which in its religious form had already been 'reformed' and made accessible to lower-class protest. Its secular, egalitarian thrust, moreover, did not entail any anti-religious feeling. To the contrary, the more radical lower-class movements which gained any popularity – the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, the Socialist Party in the 25 years before the First World War, and the Western populists in the latter decades of the 19th century – all explicitly related their secular demands for this-worldly transformation not only to moral but usually to explicitly religious themes. The movement that eventually emerged as the dominant form of American labor organization, the American Federation of Labor, embraced a reformist ideology that implicitly assumed intellectual consensus and political cooperation between the nation's lower class and its privileged groups.

Indeed, this ideology of trade unionism was so much a mere variant of critical and activist American liberalism that its leaders believed all general questions of ideology and morality to be utterly irrelevant. They were so deeply enmeshed in the national democratic religion that they could not see it all around them. The same can be said for the reform ideology of pragmatism that dominated the later 'Progressive' movement, which was inspired by the intellectual ideas of 'Pragmatism'. The Progressive movement initiated a series of urban reforms in the name of greater efficiency and rationality and in a spirit of heightened moral righteousness. Pragmatism challenged the reigning intellectual formalism in the name of practice, action, and intuitive 'good sense'. The Progressive movement and Pragmatism were simply 'this-worldly activism' by another name, and they provided a secularized form of Puritanism that made an explicit American socialism an unnecessary luxury.

England

As the other reformed nation which underwent intense industrialization in the 19th century, England presents instructive differences as well as striking similarities to the American case. It was in England that the greatest reformation of Church and state actually occurred. The small group of Puritans forced into exile by their Catholic queen in the mid-16th century returned as a disciplined band of revolutionary activists at the end of it. Eventually converting the rising gentry to their own world view, the Puritan intellectuals and their middle-class allies fought a successful revolution that murdered the King and institutionalized the first national political rights and liberties. Yet by the 1680s, the heirs to Cromwell's revolution had begun to compromise with the earthly authority of crown and aristocracy, and the dissenting Church itself became an established religion of the political and economic powers.

English society had been reformed and its intellectuals had produced a pervasive religious culture of this-worldly activism and formal equality. Yet while aspects of democratic and egalitarian politics continued to exist, political if not civil liberties remained sharply restricted to middle- and upper-class groups. On the one hand, religious and secular intellectuals promoting critical and egalitarian ideology had gained access to the government and the centers of power; they could make themselves heard and participate in policy. At the same time, as economic development and population growth created a more stratified and conflictual society, these intellectual and religious leaders were increasingly cut off from the people. The English Puritanism of old had now become Anglicanism, an officially established church, and the religious movement which had led the great revolutionary reformation of Catholic society began to be compromised in much the same way as medieval Catholicism itself. One observer wrote of the new relationship between gentry power and churchly grace this way: 'The squire . . . like the king, may be styled Head of the Church in his own parish. If the benefice be in his own gift, the vicar is his creature, and of consequence, entirely at his devotion'.

The famous Bishop Warburton celebrated the subordination of religious transcendence to the earthly state as follows: 'Public officers and ministers must act by some common policy, which may regulate and settle their several employments, powers and subordinates. But that policy is no other than the laws of a society'. And, indeed, the Anglican Church paid high stipends to Bishops so they could assume an upper-class position. Pews were sold to the highest bidding laity. Local ministers served as county magistrates and civil justices of the peace. It is no wonder that one self-satisfied Archdeacon boasted in 1792 that 'religion smoothes all inequalities because it unfolds a prospect that makes all earthly distinction nothing', or that a political dissident cried out in 1798 that 'a stranger would think that our churches were built, as indeed they are, only for the rich'. Anglicanism, much as Christianity in earlier times, had begun to withdraw from the world and to compromise its transcendent standards in the face of earthly might.

These very mixed qualities of the English situation were demonstrated by the fact that, in the very midst of such this-worldly compromise, the pressure on Anglicanism from below and from its own critical principles spawned the Methodist movement, a religious challenger that sought radically to reform it. This movement, which can be seen as a second wave of cultural-religious reformation, was initiated by John Wesley's Methodism. It is not surprising that John Wesley's movement itself manifested the contradictory tendencies of English religion as a whole. On the one hand, Methodism presented a publicly conservative ideology which stressed automatic acceptance of state rule and a nationalist spirit. On the other hand, one of the major reasons for Wesley's gratitude to the English state was its commitment to allowing freedom for religious practice, and the practical upshot of this practice was a movement that, at least relative to Anglicanism, was explosively democratic and egalitarian.

It was only after the death of Wesley in the 1790s that Methodism experienced the massive development which made it the greatest working-class religion of its time, for it was only in the early 19th century that the social dislocations of the lower classes finally made their exclusion from the established church impossible to bear. The immediate and militant reaction of the English working class to the onset of capitalist exploitation can be traced to the critical, anti-worldly leverage provided by this newly acquired Methodism faith. By focusing the attention of the working class on the tension between transcendent ethics and social affairs, the divine demands of Methodism disciplined and actually empowered its earthly followers. As the most perceptive historian of the movement, Wearmouth, has written: 'It attracted men because it gave them opportunity to exercise their mental and moral powers.'

The religious intellectuals whose revolutionary forebears had radically 'reformed' the rising gentry class had developed in Methodism a religious strategy that ensured the same kind of spiritual and mental reformation in a sharply different social grouping. At the heart of Methodist religious organization was what it characterized as its 'class structure', a form of religious organization whereby small groups of believers met regularly in private homes

for mutual help and fellowship. Such a decentralized and informal structure allowed Methodism to free itself from Anglican routinization and made it open to a new outpouring of religious enthusiasm, to renewed communal experience and, most of all, to the renewal of public 'judgment' on earthly experience by the strong and transcendent Christian God. From this new and more egalitarian congregational organization lay ministers emerged, men trained in disciplined activity and the forceful assertion of public rights.

With industrialism, urbanization, and proletarianization, the pressures for this-worldly activity and transformation grew apace. The English workers demanded, in purely secular terms, their rights of political citizenship, their equality before the law regardless of birth or wealth, and greater justice in the distribution of earthly goods. These demands were articulated in and through the cultural and organizational structures which Methodism had established for this-worldly salvation. When English workers organized radical societies in the years between 1816 and 1823, they called themselves 'political Protestants' and consciously modelled themselves after the 'religious Protestants', the Methodists. By following the decentralized and congregational patterns of the Methodists' 'classes', the leaders of these societies sought to close the distance between the political rights granted 'naturally' to all men and the workers' actual position in the earthly world itself. This low earthly position, the leaders believed, often confused the lower orders into thinking less of themselves than they should. As a radical paper of the day put it: 'Nothing but a firm Union of the people, to promote and diffuse a correct knowledge of our immediate rights, can possibly protect our Country . . . from absolute despotism.'

Methodist organization also informed the political unions of the mid-1830s: instead of biblical selections the participants read from secular radical writers like Paine, Godwin, and Owen. 'The conversations and discussions,' one participant later wrote, 'generated and encouraged the talent for public speaking, so useful in a country of corruptions and abuses of all kinds, whence its exercise becomes duty.' Chartism employed similar techniques in its heyday in the decade of the 1840s. Faced with the ban on open-air demonstrations, they turned to the Methodist technique of mass 'camp meetings'. Tens of thousands of workers often assembled, and the relation between political protest and religious forms was thoroughly apparent to participants and observers alike. As a contemporary political newspaper reported one such Chartist event: 'Never before was such a religious meeting held in Yorkshire. The Rev. preached a sermon that must have gone witheringly to the souls of the magistrates and minions of power that were present. Sure enough he did tear up by the roots the abomination of the State Church and blasphemous mammon worshippers.' The effect of English religion on worker protest did not rest simply with the enormous impact of the Methodist sect. As an enthusiastic renewal of the Puritan prophecy, Methodism set off waves of non-Methodist prophecy that were similarly inspired, movements that protested the frustration of God's transcendent will and which demanded, in his name,

the immediate realization of Heaven on earth. Working completely outside of established Methodism, for example, Chartist radicals often sought to establish a 'pure Christianity' which would 'deliver the religion of Jesus Christ from the disgrace brought upon it'. They tried, in the words of a contemporary political paper, to utilize Christianity to assert that 'equality with their proud oppressors which is denied them elsewhere'. As one popular Chartist preacher put it, these radical Chartists sought 'to erect their own temples, and offer their own worship, to the God of Justice, whom they serve'. Such demands for immediate this-worldly salvation eventually broke completely away from organized political behavior as such. The fundamental Puritan tension between anti-worldly imperatives and demands for this-worldly action is strikingly revealed in wave after wave of fanatical religious sects that arose in working-class communities in the early 19th century. The prophetess Joanna Southcott, for example, at one time had a following of more than 100,000 'Southcottians' from among the urban working poor. Identifying moneylenders with the anti-Christ and capitalists with the whore of Babylon, she predicted the imminent coming of a more secure and egalitarian world.

Methodism has been called a conservative and anti-revolutionary force; it has also been hailed as a trigger for radical protest. That each claim has partial validity reveals the unique impact of English Puritanism, which simultaneously stimulated and integrated lower-class protest and efforts at social change. Insofar as Methodism, Puritanism's latter-day successor, obviously helped to inspire early and persistent activity for social justice, it clearly had a critical and liberating social effect. Yet it was the very ability of Methodism to inspire sharp and immediate protest which guaranteed that it would have, at the same time, a certain conservatizing quality. As a reformed and this-worldly religion which remained relatively connected to the centers of society, Methodism guaranteed the access of lower-class groups to cultural standards with which they could judge and act against their society. There was, therefore, no need for lower-class groups to search for cultural support outside the institutionalized value system, though Methodism certainly was only one variant of English religious culture and not that culture as a whole.

To have pushed their secular protest completely beyond the confines of Methodist or even 'Primitive Christian' religiosity would have necessitated that the anti-capitalist movement of English workers construct an anti-religious metaphysic like Marxism. Such a task, however, was beyond the scope or inclination of the intellectuals who provided the ideology for the workers' movement. As the carriers of religious reformation, their Puritan predecessors had been able to operate within the boundaries of the established state, and as the grudgingly tolerated variant of a once triumphant dissident religion these 19th-century intellectuals had no reason to step outside of the religious rubric into a purely secular ideology. It was the relative integration of dissident intellectuals that allowed the English workers' movement to remain religious. Insofar as it prevented the development of the revolutionary socialism of Marx, Methodism was a 'conservative' force.

There is no doubt that in the course of their social protests the English working class and its intellectual leaders developed a strongly anti-capitalist ideology that embraced socialism in all but the name. When the rekindling of intellectual romanticism, the increasing scale of industry, and the impinging examples of other nations finally placed 'socialism' on the agenda of working-class protest at the end of the 19th century, the term was readily adopted and the socialism which had long existed in spirit could now exist in fact, in the person of the Labour Party and its Fabian leadership. This British socialism, it is well to remember, differed significantly from the Marxian type. Ethical in its ideology, ecumenical in its strategy, integrative in its aspirations, British socialism represented the same dual quality of cultural integration and political dissent that had characterized its predecessors in the working-class movement against early capitalist society. That it was now a thoroughly secular movement which called itself socialist merely demonstrates the fundamental continuity between the history of religious rationalization and the post-religious traditions of political criticism and economic equality. Beatrice Webb hailed Fabian socialism for hastening 'the flight of emotion away from the service of God to the service of man'. This was true. British socialism continued the empowerment of man that is, at every point, the other side of the dialectic of religious rationalization.