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A Critique of Karl Marx on Religion: Historical Instances of the Church and Revolution

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Claremonet Graduate University

Master's Thesis

2020

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Religion. We certify thatwe have read this document and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Kevin Wolfe

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Introduction

Marx was a man deeply entrenched in the concrete realities of human activity. His radical engagement with grassroots political movements distinguishes him from other historically acclaimed philosophers. Both a fastidious student of Hegel and an outspoken, prolific journalist, Marx's thought was uniquely placed at the center of social movements.[1]

It is perhaps this unique quality of Marx that has made him a pointedly polarizing figure, both now and during his time in the middle to late 19th century. Having radical ideas was not outside the norm of philosophical discourse. But, Marx's ideas and professional experiences mobilized and instigated social change and revolution, threatening political and religious establishments. The reason Marx's name carries such poignant connotation in modern America is in part the same reason he was expelled from Paris in 1845. It is also on these grounds that a careful study of Marx is a worthy endeavor.

While there are many places to explore nuance in Marxist thought, focusing on his claims on religion is vital. In academic circles Marx's contributions to philosophy are typically associated with novel ideas on *labor, alienation,* and *capital.* However, religion in Marx is a major skeletal aspect to his work at large, which is evident from the outset of his life's project. In one of his earliest and most cited writings, he claims that criticism

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[1] Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx,* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1986), 6
[2] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the Right,* introduction, trans., Joseph O'Malley, transcribed, Andy Blunden (Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1970). "Criticism" a term couched in German Philosophy can be understood as an examination against the limitations of human reason. For Marx, this notion may convey the severity in which "religion" can hold against the progress of human reason and human social progress.
[3] Ibid.
[4] David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx,* (Cambridge University Press: Oxford, UK, 2007), 23 - 27
[5] ibid
[6] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, introduction. "If therefore, instead of the *oeuvres incomplete* of our real history, we criticize the *oeuvres posthumes* of our ideal history, *philosophy*, our criticism is in the midst of the questions of which the present says: *that is the question.* What, in

of religion is a "prerequisite to all criticism."[2] Uncovering the core of Marx's critique of religion sheds light on the entirety of Marx's writings.

Furthermore, an investigation into Marx's thought on religion will bring clarity to his ideas, which have been obfuscated on account of the polemical thread with which he has been associated. In many cases, Marxism is equated with atheism, and atheism is equated with a host of political connotations. "Religion is the opium of the people…" is one of the most frequently used lines to against religious belief.[3] At its face-value, this line suggests people use religion to medicate themselves artificially--forfeiting a true view of the world in order to bring themselves into solace and hope. Yet, there is a much more complex story to be told around these ideas.

A careful study will show a much more complex understanding of Marx's view on religion. Furthermore, a careful study of religious movements following Marx will show a more complimentary relationship between these movements and religion than both Marx and conservative religious practitioners would suggest. Altogether, this paper will seek, generally, to show that Marx's ideas on religion and social change are not diametrically opposed, but in fact, in many respects, complementary. I will seek to more fully explicate a dialectical understanding of Marx's view on religion, and demonstrate through historical examples, that social change and process is not impeded by religion, but rather they act as catalysts and energizers of change.

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[2] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the Right,* introduction, trans., Joseph O'Malley, transcribed, Andy Blunden (Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1970). "Criticism" a term couched in German Philosophy can be understood as an examination against the limitations of human reason. For Marx, this notion may convey the severity in which "religion" can hold against the progress of human reason and human social progress.
[3] Ibid.

Part 1

Contextualizing Marx's work is important, as is the case for any philosopher who ultimately responds to their predecessors. However, Marx as both a political activist and philosopher was responding to both the global geopolitical circumstances of his time, and the philosophical milieu. For now, we'll turn to the political circumstances.

There is a peculiar aspect to Marx's engagement with the political circumstances in Germany. Namely, Marx was quite focused on a critique of the *modern state,* despite Germany lagging behind in its own formation of such a state.[4] Marx saw Germany as politically underdeveloped compared to the rest of the modern world, while at the same time, still participating in sophisticated philosophical discourse.[5] While Germany was *practically* lagging behind, it was *ideally* setting the global pace in philosophical conversations. In the introduction to *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy or Right,* Marx explicates this peculiar dynamic in an effort to secure a foundation from which to articulate a criticism against the modern (ideal) state.[6]

In *The Critique* Marx defines the modern state by a few central tenets.[7] The first of these tenets is that the modern state consists of a clear separation between "civil" and "political life."[8] To more fully explain this relationship, Marx elaborates at length how this separation is a departure from previous eras' relationships, where political and civil life were unified. He claims "The whole existence of the medieval classes was political;

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[4] David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx,* (Cambridge University Press: Oxford, UK, 2007), 23 - 27
[5] ibid
[6] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, introduction. "If therefore, instead of the *oeuvres incomplete* of our real history, we criticize the *oeuvres posthumes* of our ideal history, *philosophy*, our criticism is in the midst of the questions of which the present says: *that is the question*. What, in progressive nations, is a *practical* break with modern state conditions, is, in Germany, where even those conditions do not yet exist, at first a critical break with the philosophical reflexion of those conditions"
[7] Leopold, 60 - 80
[8] ibid, par 303

their existence was the existence of the state. Their legislative activity, their grant of taxes for the realm was merely a particular issue of their universal political significance and efficacy. Their class was their state."[9] Put in Hegelian terms, the particular (civil) individuals comprising the universal state (political) were only distinguishable by function, and not by motivating cause. That function's purpose was solely directed toward the state, and not to individuals themselves.

According to Marx, this separation was first completely realized in The French Revolution, because at that time, civil classes and political classes were fully distinct, and--as is quite evident in this example--"antithetical". This brings to the fore the second tenet, of Marx's conception of the modern state. On this point Marx claims that not only were the political and civil classes separated by their principle and motivation, they were opposed and contrary to one another. Marx attributes "particular interests" to individuals of civil society, and a "universal interest" of the state. Where those interests were conflated in the middle ages, were now conflicting in the modern state.[10]

The philosophical context in which Marx writes is also equally crucial to fully and completely understand how he perceives religion within his larger system. While Marx was responding to several philosophers throughout the development of his work, commentators on religion were a central point of focus.[11] Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feauerbach, and Georg Hegel are the three which will be a point of focus with regard to Marx's thought on religion.

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[9] ibid

[10] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, par 280, 281

[11] Other *Young Hegelians* in which Marx concerned himself with include Strauss, Ruge, Hess and Striner

The relationship between Marx and Hegel has been regarded as "one of the most challenging problems in the history of thought."[12] In all the continuity shared by Hegel and Marx, their pronounced divergence on the role of God may trump the entirety of that continuity. The reason for this being that for Hegel, God is where his system begins and ends. For Marx, the abolishment of God is also, in many respects the beginning and end of his thought. Hegel writes in *Science of Logic,* "As [pure] science, truth is pure self-consciousness as it develops itself and has the shape of the self, so that that which exists in and for itself is the conscious concept and the concept as such is that which exists in and for itself."[13] For Hegel, logic and truth is that which is simply "absolute form itself." And he continues, that "It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit."[14] For Hegel, God is the developing *Spirit* of the universe which becomes realized by *particular* minds which conceive of God. The meta-process of *sublation* finds it's ultimate reality in the mind of God, which is itself pure self-consciousness.[15]

Hegel's work, especially in *The Phenomenology* is, to the least, a dense and speculative one that outlines the holistic metaphysical reality. It is no surprise then that *God* is the epicenter in that process, which is a description about the universe and about consciousness and particular consciousnesses. Religion and God for Hegel stops well short of any justified practical theology--or rather, the concrete activities of

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[12] Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx,* Humanities Press: New York, NY, 1950), 13

[13] Georg Hegel, *Science of Logic*, *Science of Logic*. Found in Lenin's *Collected Works*. 4th Edition. Volume 38. Trans. Clemence Dutt, Ed. Stewart Smith, (Progress Publishers: Moscow, RU, 1976), 21.34

[14] Ibid

[15] "Sublation" being the process commonly called "abolish," "preserve," transcende," is the signature mark of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit.

organized religion. Hegel's comments on God can be summarized in this excerpt from *The Phenomenology:* "God is solely attainable in pure speculative knowledge, he is only within that knowledge, and he is merely that knowledge itself, for he is spirit, and this speculative knowledge is revealed religion's knowledge."[16] It is on such speculative grounds that Marx makes his dramatic and immediate departure from Hegel.

But even while Marx makes such a dramatic opposition to Hegel's central tenets, there is a peculiar shared discourse, which allows Marx to converse with Hegel's writings with a formidable intelligibility. Marx and Hegel may have been on different planets, but they were making paralleled observations about the heavens, so to speak. The radical departure from the two thinkers on the subject comes down to the central place God plays in the development and ends of human history. For Hegel, God is imminently manifest in the idea of reason. That one can reason presupposes an unconditioned reality (God) that exists irrespective of the subjective observer of God.[17] And, what Hegel considers "fulfillment of history" is the activity of moving *back* and through God, which is *pure freedom*. As Sidney Hook simply states, "History [for Hegel] is the autobiography of God."[18] With that said, Hegel certainly connotes a deterministic aspect to history as found in God. As he claims,

> With this explanation, Divine Providence may be said to stand to the world and its process in the capacity of absolute cunning. God lets men do as they please with their particular passions and interests; but the result is the accomplishment of-not their plans, but his, and these differ decidedly from the ends primarily sought by those whom he employs[19]

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[16] Georg Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit (1807),* trans. J.B. Bailie, (Harper and Row: New York, NY, 1910)
[17] Ibid.
[18] Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx; studies in the intellectual development of Karl Marx,* (Humanities Press: New York, NY), 1950, 36.
[19] Hegel, *Science of Logic,* Par 209

The heart of Hegel's conception of history--his formulation of divine providence--is where we find Marx vehemently at odds with Hegel.

Historical development and process is the jargon shared by Hegel and Marx, but the source and catalyst of this movement are at stark contrast. Marx, like Hegel, does believe history is formed and developed in a systematic and directional way, but that movement is centered on the heart and will of society. The base needs and humans and the desire to live and flourish has brought about revolution and property redistribution et al. God is not simply uninvolved in this order but is the ultimate distraction to historical development and progress. Which is why he plainly says, "Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering."[20] This is to say that the need for religion is conditioned upon the fact that human suffering (through systematic economic disparity) prevails and through the a misdirection of protest. The distressed society finds falty and *unreal* emancipation through religion, according to Marx. Human flourishing cannot occur through self-willed determination if it's suffering is handled through abstract and non-empirical means, i.e., religion. As will be further elaborated, Marx's critique of the Hegelian idea of religion is axiomatic to the tenets set out in his thought.

Another prominent influence to the development of Marx is Ludwig Feaurbach. Feaurbach, a critic of Hegel, specifically with regard to conceptions of God and religion, develops a humanistic perspective on religion. In one of his most prominent works, *Essence of Christianity,* Feaurbach makes a key distinction about (the Christian) God contra Hegel. Hegel's idea of God--according to Feaurbach (what he calls "speculative

[20] Marx, *Critique of the Philosophy of Right*, introduction

conception”)--holds that God is ultimate *self-consciousness*, an absolute kind of subject that is necessitated by the process of *sublation*. Feaurbach, however challenges the Hegelian notion that it is possible for an absolute subject to exist without the dependency of the object--in this case human beings.[21] He argues that it is not possible for God “if he is to exist for us, to be an object to us— he must necessarily be thought.”[22] For Feuerbach, a human being’s mind is an indispensible, and therefore, fundamental source, of the idea of God.[23]

“Religion is the dream of the human mind,” Feuerbach says plainly in the preface of his novel work.[24] While this terse statement may summarize the conclusions of the Hegelian critic, by itself, it does not completely satisfy the breadth of his claims. The essential trait which stands to contrast Hegel is that religion and the idea of God is undeniably bound to the empirical elements of nature--i.e., humankind and their ideas. Similar to Hegel, Feuerbach distinguished two aspects of God: metaphysical (ultimate, absolute, highest being) and particular. However he makes a compelling argument that the “divine predicates” are inextricably bound to the subject.[25] A divine, infinite being, he argues, is only so far known as to the knower, in this case humans. One “cannot know whether God is something else in himself or for himself than he is for *me*; what he is to me is to me all that he is.”[26] It is the fallacy that divine predicates and the subject have

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[21] Ludwig Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity,* Found in *The Fiery Brook (1841),* trans by Zawar Hanfi and George Eliot*,* Verso: (New York, NY, 2012)*,* 226
[22] Ibid
[23] There is certainly a case to be made that Feurerbach’s arguments are slightly hasty, as Hegel conception of God is complex and nuanced in The Phenomenology. It could be conceived that he, too, holds that God exists only through objective consciousness’ conceiving of God.
[24] Feurerbach, *Essence of Christianity,* xiii
[25] Ibid, 19
[26] Ibid, 16

real distinguishability, that leads to Feurerbach's coined term "theology as anthropology."[27]

The influence of Ferurerbach on Marx, is not easily overstated. As Hook mentions, in the early period of Marx's coming of influence (1841-1845), "he was Feurerbachian."[28] It is not difficult to conceive of Feuerbach's appeal to Marx. He, perhaps scandalously, turns the ultimate focus of humankind from outward and heavenly, to inward and concrete. The extent to which Feuerbach was successful in achieving this end is not without debate, but to have made progress toward this direction completely disrupts the fabric of intellectual religious thought of his day. In this way he establishes important preconditions on which Marx can expound and critique further.

The major departure of Marx from Feuerbach is quite evident in the short work *Thesis on Feuerbach.* In every major point, Marx concludes that Feuerbach has, on the one hand, "resolve[d] the religious essence into the human essence," but that that movement stops short of becoming, "sensuous human activity [and] practice."[29] Essentially, while Feuerbach has made a significant and momentous development--bringing the heavens to earth--he has stopped well short of identifying the true development of objective reasoning, thought, et al. Namely, he has not comprehended that human beings who are couched in their concrete and social realities, develop through "practice".[30] For Marx, the object of focus has been moved but remained caged

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[27] Ibid, xi Feuerbach later draws on the second person of the trinity to further the idea of the centrality of humankind (see pages 50-58)
[28] Hook, 272
[29] Karl Marx, *Thesis of Feurerbach,* Found in *Marx on Religion,* ed by John Raines, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA) 2002
[30] ibid

in the sphere of theory and abstraction. Which is why he concludes his critique on the note that profound, abstract, even accurate theory, is empty without any real and significant change in the world in which those objective beings breathe, eat, and work.[31] Feuerbach, according to Marx, is guilty of sharing with the lot of philosophers hitherto--namely, that they are all only theoreticians.

The final major influential figure I will examine in context of Marx's ideas of God and religion is Bruno Bauer. Marx, referencing Bauer states at the outset of *On the Jewish Question*, "You Jews are egoists if you demand a special emancipation for yourselves as Jews. As Germans, you ought to work for the political emancipation of Germany, and as human beings, for the emancipation of mankind."[32] For Bauer, the crux of the issue with religion--in this case, Judaism--was that it stymied the greater cause of *political emancipation* for the German, the human being. The crux of Bauer's argument is that he believes the modern and *true* "democractic" state is undermined by the nature of the existing "Christian State." This state (what he calls a "non-state"), by its own nature, grants privileges to those who abide by the sacred norms established.[33] If, according to Bauer, the Jewish people (and other religious sects) cannot relinquish their religious commitments, then they, by the nature of a religious commitment, forfeit that which is necessary to establish a truly democratic state, safeguarded against the internal biases of transcendent and abstract ideals.[34]

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[31] "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
[32] Karl Marx, *On The Jewish Question,* Found in *Marx on Religion,* ed by John Raines, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA) 2002
[33] Ibid
[34] There is little debate about the antisemetic tones of Bauer's work. Although, as it reads, one assumes the Jewish religion is his example, applies across other religions. As he points out that the existing "Christian State" is also of pointed concern, as it also holds certain religious and internal priorities that are applied to the state at large.

Marx, along a similarly crafted argument, criticizes Bauer's justification for abolition of religion--albeit with a more elongated and complex case. It is this argument, against Bauer, where we begin to see the convergence of Marx's criticism of "the modern state" and the criticism of religion as the seeds unto which Marx springboards into a positively crafted theory which became Marxism. Firstly, Marx makes a strong case against Bauer arguing that he has constructed an argument that "raises questions which are not part of his problem, and he solves problems which leave this question unanswered."[35] To elaborte on the first point, Marx conjectures that Bauer is asking whether religion (in this case Judaism) is a barrier to establishing "political emancipation." However, according to Marx, this is not the crux of the matter as is exemplified by the United States' constitution that has (at least functionally) established a separation of church and state.[36] Furthermore, Bauer raises the criticism against both the Jewish religion and the Germanic Christian State. To Marx, this confines the issue to a "theological one" and does not overcome what is the core of the problem--the structure of the state iself.[37] On the second point raised against Bauer, Marx claims that Bauer has not sufficiently brought clarity on the issue of "emancipation" in general. It is here where Marx makes a significant signpost that marks themes of his later work. He makes a distinction between "political emancipation" and "human emancipation." His ultimate claim in this regard is that humans can be "unfree" in a political emancipated state.[38] And, it is further evidenced by humans practicing religion in a "politically emancipated state" that signifies an incomplete freedom. And moreover, that religious

[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, "the state can free itself from a restriction without man being really free from this restriction, that the state can be a *free state* without man being a *free man."*

practice, which alienates humans from their concrete realities, actually contributes to the continuous of the State.

It is this argument that sets the stage to fully develop a view of Marx's complex and holistic critique of religion. The context involving his understanding of the modern state and the critique of other Young Hegelians converges as Marx begins to explicate his own understanding of liberation and economic theory. He takes recourse to undermine the modern political establishment and uses religion as the voice against it. With the aforementioned context at hand, I will now turn to understanding Marx's holistic critique of religion couched in the larger system. I will explain Marx's response to religion through several of his major works chronologically, and conclude with a summary that connects the ideas and thought within those works.

As has already been discussed, Marx's work *On the Jewish Question,* critiques Bauer's own critique of religion by ultimately saying the argument stopped short of solving the actual issue human beings face in society. Namely, Marx argues that Bauer has presented religion as a barrier to *political emancipation,* which for Marx, is not the equivalent of *human emancipation*.[39] What remains to be discussed further is Marx's own views on religion and the way in which it corresponds to his ideas of human emancipation.

Firstly, what does Marx mean by "human emancipation"? To summarize Marx's criticism of Bauer's idea of "political emancipation," he says, "The limitations of political emancipation are immediately apparent from the fact that the state can liberate itself from a restriction without man himself being truly free of it, that a state can be a free

[39] Marx, *On the Jewish Question,*

state without man himself being a free man."[40] Here Marx leads into a second part of his work, *On the Jewish Question,* where he outlines the aspects of the political state, which cultivate a dualistic, abstract, and therefore, "individualistic" existence. For Marx, the political (democratic) state sustains a *negative* relationship of humans from other humans. It establishes a state that maintains the "rights" of "men," as "protection" against the world and others who may infringe on those rights.[41] As Marx describes, this is an "egoist" human--a "self sustained monad," who is "separated from other men and the community."[42] He offers an eloquent summary in saying that after the feudal period, the "revolution dissolves civil society into its component parts without revolutionizing these parts and subjecting them to criticism."[43] Essentially, the political state, while an improvement on the previous, leaves humans in internal isolation. Without being as explicit (at least in this work) about what a society that transcends the political state would be, he alludes to this in using the phrase "species-being," which aligns with Marx's thesis: that humans are dependent on and determined by their social existence, and therefore with one another.

On the Jewish Question, is largely a work criticizing Bauer's assessment of religion as barring human beings from being freed into *political emancipation.* However, in the second part of this work, Marx offers an understanding of "religion in general" contra the particular Jewish faith, as it stands within the democratic and free state. In this state religion becomes an aspect of the "individual man" among other aspects of that human who composes the civil society. As Marx put it, "the democratic state...

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[40] Ibid., 50
[41] Ibid, 60-65
[42] ibid
[43] Ibid, 63

relegates religion to the level of the other elements of civil society."[44] It is an aspect of a person that is "intermediated" by the state. For Marx, religion itself is not caustic--it is a symptom of that which is caustic. Namely, religion in this kind of state essentially discourages natural social relations in a positive manner. It gives credence to this problematic social dualism, where one can worship amoung individuals, but be in the least concerned with the fellow congregant's social wellness. It can make disparate their real, concrete *empirical* life and their abstract and intuitive life. Religion in a democratic-political state, is a gauge by which that state can perceive the degree to which it has the ability to function as an intermediary to the individuals within it. It is why the United States is able to not only have an "emancipated" state, but that that state allows for a wellspring of religious flourishing. If one can exercise their interior life without much or any regard for their real and empirical circumstances protected by the state, then this kind of political establishment is successful. For Marx, lacking the acknowledgement of one's empirical circumstances is at the heart of the issue and the barrier to *human emacipation*.

Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Critique of Right,* contains one of his most (mis)quoted epithets to date: "[Religion] is the opium of the people."[45] The first few paragraphs of this work offer some of the most profound expressions of Marx's understanding of religion. Readers may often only understand opium in one way in this epithet, namely, its ability to ease pain temporarily—not to cure. However, understand a more full extent of opium use at the time, will illuminate a better undrstand of Marx's use of the term.

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[44] Marx, *On the Jewish Question,* 52
[45] Marx, *Hegel's Critique of Right,* 171

Opium in the 19th century was, to say the least, widely used for medicinal purposes. It was used to treat a plethora of ailments and was often used by working classes to treat a variety of illness as they often did not have the ability to see doctors.[46] Marx himself used opium to treat his illness in the later part of his life. As widely as opium was used, it had a massive capital in the marketplace and was the source of immense profit. The natural result of this is that it was often the case that forms of medicinal opium were diluted or compromised to sell to the working classes. Therefore, while opium, a common and effective pain reliever and general antidote for a variety of medicinal purposes, also was at the center of class struggle and the imbalance of wealth distribution and corruption.

In this metaphor, Marx's more complex and *dialectical* views on religion come to light. Religion as "opium of the people," is to say that it is at one and the same time a relief from suffering, but it is also at the same time temporary and contaminated--it does not ultimately cure the issue at hand. When he says that religion is both "protest" and "expression" of real suffering, he is articulating that the conditions under which people exist, require religion to express and alleviate that suffering.[47] But what is known to Marx and not the practitioners of religion is that it is also a protest against the need for religion. It is to say that the squalid conditions of the working class require a fantastic narrative which promises hope, unattainable and unforeseeable in the present life.

Most importantly, Marx's critique of religion, especially in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* is a critique that redirects his audience to a critique of the economic and political structure of society. He writes: "the criticism of heaven turns into the

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[46] Andrew Mckinnon, "Reading 'Opium of the People': Expression, Protest and Dialectics of Religion," *Critical Sociology,* University of Aberdeen, 5
[47] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* 171

criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics."[48] As Andrew Mckinnon points out, Marx is not undermining the "sign," "heart," and "soul," of which religion is the container, he is ultimately taking issue with "the conditions that require illusions."[49] Those conditions are the situation of the poor, who have little agency in the ability to alter their own liberation from distress and poverty. It is only natural for human beings to seek relief from those conditions. For Marx, it is problematic that the direction in which this often happens leaves the earth, so to speak.[50] Yet, if that forcible momentum could be dislodged from revolving around the "illusory sun," its inertia could be harnessed in such a way as to be directed toward a new orbit--earthlings and their earth-bound liberation.

While the "Thesis of Feuerbach" is a short and concise work, it provides readers with a deep sense of Marx's attitude toward Fuerbach, a critic of religion himself and what that criticism meant for Marx's understanding of religion. There is one basic common thread that flows throughout this work: "praxis."[51] As already discussed, Marx takes issue most prominently with Feauebach regarding the interior and egocentric perspective of his anthropomorphic religion. As becomes more evident, Marx sees the world as a series of social interactions and this lens provides the most bare perspective of society. Which is why throughout this short work Marx is most critical in saying, "Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human

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[48] Ibid, 172
[49] Mckinnon, 17, and Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 171
[50] Ibid, 171. Marx draws upon an astronomical metaphor where humans project revolving around a sun instead of "revolving around themselves." Here, there is a hint of Feauerbachian critique of religion--where humans project outward and imaginary hope. The difference for Marx in his critique is that does not see religion itself as the cause and source of human bondage. The abstract solution put forth by other Young Hegelians, is not a complete critique or solution. It solves an abstract and empty problem that does not "change the world."
[51] "Concerning Feuerbach 182-184

essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations."[52] Where Marx, time and time again, separates himself from the other Young Hegelians, especially with regard to religion, is that a criticism of religion itself is a retreat to criticizing an empty abstraction. For Marx the reality of religion is a byproduct of social conditions, and for it to be resolved or abolished, would be only an indication that those social circumstances are such that they do not lend a need for religion and illusory happiness, because that happiness is satisfied through earth-bound resources.[53]

A critical element of this concise work is on Marx's idea of "practice," often interpreted as "praxis." As has been covered previously, Marx's departure from Feuerbach, is his inability to completely transcend idealism. He brings down "man's perspective" to the earth (man's mind), but it still remains an *abstraction* and disconnected from the concrete social situation of humans. "The battles that the [Young Hegelians (Feuerbach among them)] fought were sectarian episodes in a common religious tradition that they shared with their opponents."[54] For Marx there was a certain kind of breaking point in the historical development of philosophy, where theory could not adequately render significant change or development.[55] For Marx any theory or philosophical endeavor is empty, and without substance, if it does not manifest itself into a realizable and concrete manner. Praxis, for Marx, is a crucial missing component omitted by his predecessors--idealists and materialists alike.

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[52] Ibid, 183
[53] Ibid, "
[54] Hook, 282
[55] Marx, *Thesis of Feurerbach,* 184

The final work of Marx's criticism of religion I will lend focus to is "The Social Principles of Christianity." This work stands apart in some respects because it offers a more rare glimpse into Marx's (perhaps personal) vendetta with Christianity itself; whereas in prior works, Marx situates religion as a byproduct of a greater oppressive system, The State. Nonetheless, in this short sarcastic article, Marx uses parallels and allegory to vividly illustrate his perspective on both economic systems and its complementary component, Christianity.

Sarcastically, Marx argues, by its very title, that Christianty has failed to establish any kind of liberating or justice-oriented principles.[56] He summarizes this in stating that "The social principles of Christianity transfer the consistorial councilors' settlement of all infamies to heaven, and thereby justify the continuation of these infamies on earth."[57] The need for some kind of reduction of the injustices plagued by the working class in Prussia, at the time, was without debate. The conditions under which this class lived was complete distress. The vindication offered to the working class through "salvation" was doubly beneficial to reifying the economic and political status quo. On the one hand, those (which were large in number) who lived under these conditions were able to shoulder them through a kind of artificial hope outside of the life they lived at present. And secondly, the sin-salvation complex would naturally garner support to further give justification to the current ruling system.

In the "Social Principles of Christianity," Marx appears to directly attack religion itself. But, a more careful reading will show that Marx is continuing his critique against

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[56] Marx, "Social Principles of Christianity," Found in *Marx on Religion,* ed by John Raines, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA) 2002, 185
[57] Ibid

the focus on the abstract. For Marx, Christianity "writes blank checks from God."[58] Tying the economic and religious criticism into one, there is simply no concrete, empirical or real change taking place under Christanity. A blank check from heaven, to Marx, is "null." It is bare, empty, nothingness, that does not change the circumstances of those oppressed. To couch Marx's criticism of Christanity more accurately, it is important to note that any system which further propagates abstraction--and therefore complacency within a hegemonic social class system--is of the same ilk and same criticism. While Christianty has different metaphors and narratives, according to Marx, it's another cog in the piston of unjust capitalism.

The most important, misconceived, and novel ideas about religion in Marx is that he criticises religion from within it's core, and not directly head-on.[59] More specifically, as has been duly noted, Marx believed that religion is a by-product, bolstered by the unequal social circumstances of various classes. As referenced in *On the Jewish Question,* Marx does not believe that Buauer's case for abolishing religion leads to a true kind of emancipation. He conjects that Bauer's argument fails to remain critical because in a "fully developed" political state (e.g., the United States), the "Jewish Question" is no longer a theological criticism, it is a criticism of the state itself.[60] In other words, Marx indirectly approves of the development of the political formation of the modern state from the feudal structure of society, where tenets of theology are not directly related to the state. Since Bauer's argument is essentially a theological one, it

[58] Ibid
[59] In "Social Principles of Christianity" Marx does potentially criticize the tenets of Christanity itself, but does so with subtle sarcasm. Even in this short work, he combines both a direct criticism with a more serious tone against the ails which bring religion about in the first place.
[60] Marx, *On the Jewish Question,* 49

does not go beyond what the political state has already successfully established, namely a separation between theology and political affairs.

The crux of Marx's criticism against religion is that it (uncoincidentally) is aligned well into the fold of "German Philosophy," which descends from Heaven to Earth.[61] For Marx, the most important part of philosophy--and that which is hampered by religion--is that "man is met in the flesh," and not from what "[they] say, imagine or conceive."[62] Religion is the pillar on which dualism stands, and it is that dualism, enacted and weaponized by the state, that ultimately prevents *real,* concrete change and development in the world.[63] Religion, for Marx--the "aroma of the state"--is that which best illustrates the perverted practice of all who believe the status quo is ordinary and without criticism. It is the escape and hope for workers who are malnourished and maltreated (diluted optimum, as it were), and the weapon of consciousness for the owners who prey on the workers for bigger and wider profits.[64]

Why, then, does religion not only exist, but thrive? As Marx cites, in democratic states "religiosity is *par excellence."*[65] To answer this, he offers a very obfuscated but important paragraph in the "On the Jewish Question." Those who exist in the democratic state, do so in such a way that they are liberated and free "through the medium of the state."[66] That is, while they are their concrete and socially situated selves, in a democratic state, transfer themselves through the filter of the state, which results in an

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[61] Marx, *German Ideology,* found in *Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels Collected Works,* Vol I*.,* (Lawrence and Wishart Radical Independent Radical Publishers, UK, 1989)*,* 100. Basically, Idealism
[62] ibid
[63] Marx, *Thesis of Feuerbach,*
[64] This arrangement would explain in the present day, where the middle to upper class have a formal casual relationship with religion and those in poverty have a more devoted and committed relationship. For the former, it simply is that which enables the continuation of the status quo. For the latter, it is the only hope that allows them to endure perpetual distress and hardship.
[65] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 49
[66] Ibid, 50

abstract and isolated individual diluted of their true “species-being.” In other words, human beings, under traditional social contract theory, forfeit certain aspects of who they are in order to maintain abstract concepts that establish a state or constitution.[67] The input is pure, social human, the output is abstract, individual civilian. This idea not only complements religion (in this case Christianity), according to Marx, it runs exactly parallel. In Christianity, he argues, Christ is a mediary to God by which one finds salvation and religious liberation. Similarly, humans find political liberation through the state.[68]

Finally, there is an important, albeit terse note worth mentioning on how a religious attitude is framed in Marx. While Marx heavily cirticicized abstractionism, he was not against visionary thinking and hope.

Another important misconception about Marx’s attitude toward religion is pinpointing exactly where and what the target of his criticism is. That is, when one encounters Marx through a cursory form, there are battle cries to “revolutionize,” and “abolish religion!” But, the word abolish specifically used throughout Marx (*aufheben*) is to be understood as a transcending or overcoming, rather than a negative kind of removal.[69] As Mckinnon mentions, opium had another important trait. It opened the mind to a new and illusory vision. These visions, while according to Marx, artificial, were nonetheless visions of hope and utopia--heaven. Marx is far from nihilistic. The desire and hope for something better is an important specifically human trait. Marx would simply argue that to *aufenben* religion, is to redirect the energy for a better life from

[67] See Hobbes and Rousseau. This is articulated as negative qualities of humans, like the proneness to murder, steal and cheat.
[68] Ibid, 50
[69] Mckinnon, 18

outward and in the future, to inward and at present. When this happens religion will evaporate from the minds of those who needed it to survive.

The question which continues to surface, is whether or not, and to what extent Marx's views were accurate, in this case, specific to religion. The accuracy by which to make sound judgments of Marx's thought would be to note if religion prevails in the political state where civil society is distinct from the state. Does the interiority of individuals prevail in order to further an unbalanced economy? And, is religion a purely internal affair, which contributes to exploitation through the continuous of oppressive systems and laws?

In several respects it would be simple to see that Marx's novel ideas hold a significant and important interpretation of what still exists as a dualistic society reified by the democratic state. There is certainly an abundance of material dedicated to an economics analysis of Marx. What I will seek to evaluate is the place of religion in the democratic state. For Marx, put simply, "the existence of religion is the existence of a defect."[70] The source of the defect is with the democratic state promulgating the dualistic structure of humans toward each other and themselves. Does religion in a democratic state actually indicate the existence of defects and therefore, the economic and political reification of the status quo? Does religion satisfy the want of those in need, and does it serve as scapegoat to the usury of the wealthy?

Using three concrete examples in the twentieth century, I will show that this perspective is not only incorrect, but inversely true. Religion is an important--even essential-- component to the agitation and disruption of the political and economic

[70] Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 49

status quo.[71] David Chapell makes a very compelling case that The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was successful in large part due to the energy and fervor of the religious protestors, who were motivated by more than a change of earth-bound laws and justice. The development of a New South African constitution, post-apartheid, utilized and depended on religious tradition and principles to overcome and reconcile the nation together. And finally, the protest against military despotism in Latin America was guided and led by Liberation Theology, that brought Marxist ideas together with political protest. The last example, even depended on the thought of Marx to form its own identity--prioritizing the needs of humans. While the outcome of these movements did not resolve the systematic inequities on which they were premised, significant change and progress was made.[72]

Part 2, Analysis

David Chappell, in *Stone of Hope,* at the very least, nuances many accepted narratives of the great story that is the Civil Rights Movement. This movement is often characterized as a cohesive political protest championed by the progressive majority of southern blacks in harmony with liberal, northern whites. However, depicted by Chappell, it was actually a political byproduct of “old time” religious revival. It was, in fact, religion that fueled the unifying spirit of this movement. Religion was the potent, unifying factor that splices through the constructed binary narratives of *liberal* and

[71] It is important to note, this is not *all* religion or even the majority of the practitioners of religion. It is very well still the case that religion is used to refine the status quo and call into question any protest against it. The question here is whether or not, altogether, religion serves an existential purpose of satisfying a human defect.

[72] Some may argue against this (see, Alexander, *The New Jim Crow)*, that we have only reformed the state of segregation through mass incarceration. However realistic this is, it still holds that laws were changed and lives impacted through achievements of this movement.

conservative. On the one hand, liberals—in all their institutional resistance—had no solid foundation on which to springboard any sort of aggressive campaign against the inequality promoted in the south.[73] However, by this same token, the segregationists lacked the same unifying factors. They could not garner a pointed theological or ecumenical stance providing the necessary bolstering to sustain segregation.

Chappell presents a compelling thesis that essentially subverts assumed narratives about the Civil Rights Movement. He intensifies the paradoxes and ironies through his pointed language, describing the 'old time religion' as "irrational," and "supernatural," albeit pragmatic and useful. This religious proclivity, inherited from the prophets and apostles, injected protestors with an "apocalyptic" vision, in which their demonstrations went beyond sheer political protest and a call for change. They saw themselves simultaneously participating in an earthly and cosmic justice. The protestors who inherited the prophetic religion of scripture understood, as did Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King Jr., the essential disposition of humankind. As Chappell notes, a large measure of the cohesion within the movement was due to King's understanding of human nature as redacted from Niebuhr. Niebuhr and King, essentially saw power as corrupt, and therefore, understood political change to come only through "coercion." Hence, the Civil Rights Movement, by this religious and theological foundation, could not resort or be reduced to participating in the political discourses of reason. That's what created hegemonic Jim Crow in the first place!

King's attitude toward social reform and justice collided with his theological proclivity, as most notably referenced in his essay on Jeremiah, "The Significant

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73 David L. Chappell, A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004; paperback, 2005),

Contributions of Jeremiah to Religious Thought". In this essay King hails Jeremiah as rejected and isolated from society because of this strong and righteous devotion to Yahweh.[74] And that this devotion included an poignant criticism of "idolatry" committed by the Nation of Israel. Jeremiah preached a return to justice and purity of society. To King this amounted to "religion" disrupting the "status quo" of society. Religion's "worst disservice" he argues is to be "sponsors and supports" of the status quo.[75] Jeremiah was an example of what King and other civil rights activists believed was an archetypal prophet, demonstrating not only justice-oriented outcomes for people, but, more importantly, a complete devotion and obedience to God.

As mentioned, King's ultimate views of theology, but specifically his attitude toward humanity, were largely influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, who developed what King adopted as "Prophetic Religion."[76] This proclivity developed out of--and in many respects, stood above--the contexts of neo-orthodoxy and liberalism. King, like Niebuhr, had a pessimistic view of humanity, in that he believed humans required a salvific moment to reconcile "sin."[77] At the same time, King adamantly resisted a kind of ideal humanism, which had proven unfruitful in the present crisis.[78] This is further emphasized through King's opposition to J. H. Jackson, who opposed King's method of protest, and was keen to work out black equality through the liberal project of discourse

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[74] Martin Luther King Jr. "The Significant Contributions to Jeremiah to Religious Thought," published in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I: Called to Serve*, 1948. Stanford University. (https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/significant-contributions-jeremiah-religious-thought)

[75] Ibid, King in his conclusion remarks that religion has at its worst simply been a reflection of the state (as was the case for Israel during the time of Jeremiah). But a true kind of religion is a disruptor to that status quo.

[76] Chappell

[77] Martin Luther King Jr. "The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr," published in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I: Called to Serve*, 1948. Stnadford University (https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/significant-contributions-jeremiah-religious-thought)

[78] Ibid

and ultimate trust in the foundation of the Constitution and politics.[79] Yet, Jackson hailed democracy and post-war unity as the better way to achieve a desired outcome. His point was that "This fight [for civil rights] is more important to America as a nation than it is to us as a race."[80] Essentially, Jackson endorsed the achievement of democracy as that through which equity would be realized.

Through this lens, it is clear to see how King as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement and as an ardent *Prophet* to Christianity held a tension between using the forces of human created structures with the transcendent and cosmic powers of justice. He was committed to a Niebuhrian theology that required, "a combination of this worldly and other-worldly hopes."[81] In other words, King held a certain kind of "dialectical" theology which held the temporary earth and eternal heavens together. Humans were neither completely forsaken to an empty and destitute position--only passively redeemed by the will of a mighty, powerful and removed God--nor rescued by the powers of reason and savvy government policy. Christians, according to King, were redeemed through salvation and called upon to enact justice, here and now, through an eternal covenant which transcends the bounds of corporeality.

The narrative about religion in the Civil Rights Movement would not be complete without mention of the White Southern Church. Common associated imagery includes throngs of angry white people jesting black protestors. One may also assume a good majority of these antisegregationalists were deeply religious. Chappell challenges this

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[79] Wallace Best, "'The Right Achieved and the Wrong Way Conquered': J.H. Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Conflict over Civil Rights," Religion and American Culture16, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 206.
[80] Ibid, 208
[81] Martin Luther King Jr. "The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr," published in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I: Called to Serve*, 1948, Martin Luther King Jr Research and Education Institute, Stanford University.

notion by noting that one great weakness of the anti-segregationist movement was the inability of the church to take an equally combative stance as energetic black protestors. Chappell states that "white churches were unwilling to make sacrifices to preserve segregation. They loved other things— peace [and] social order—more. They could not make defense of segregation the unifying principle of their culture."[82] White churches, against misconceived ideas, did not take the necessary active protest for a continuance of segregation, like their adamant political counterparts. White Christian laypersons generally were not outspoken activists who felt that their fervent participation in the segregationist movement was an essential part of the faithfulness to God.[83] In short, the religious activity and energy of the white southern churches to back the segregationist agenda was completely outmatched by the prophetic religion and protest of the Black churches. Even with a minority in numbers, the fervency and passion of the black church energized and sustained the Civil Rights Movement.

A particular reading of Chappell would suggest that God was on the side of the minority of Black protestor-revivalists. While both churches--the black and white--were, in formal respects, equally "religious," the black church was active, energetic, motivated, and determined. The manifestations of which resulted in fierce and powerful protests that were relentless in the demand and fruition of political and social change. The source of this "prophetic religion's" energy and motivation--against the Marxist paradigm--came from outside the human source of reason. It was a transcendent belief that "love is the most durable power in the world...and the most potent instrument

[82] Chappell, 107
[83] Ibid, 105-129

available in mankind's quest for peace and security."[84] King's theology and philosophy combined both transcendent ideas and pragmatic action. He and his followers (at least to some degree) believed that to accomplish their goals they could not return hate with hate. And in doing so, they were, at the same time, faithfully abiding in the mission of their service to God. Implementing this strategy led to a successful endeavor. In this specific example, a microcosm to social progress, achieved a degree of what Marx may have had in mind for change. But the source and means by which that was achieved, was ironically through extraneous, religious ideas.

Because Communism was a cultural talking point of King's day, and because King himself was a socialist and 'revolutionist,' he duly noted his thoughts on Marx and Communism in *Strength to Love.* For King, "the success of communism in the world today is due to the failure of Christians to live up to the highest ethical tenets inherent in its system."[85] Despite his adamant distinction between Communism and Christianity, King was more ambiguous about the ends to which both sought to achieve. The essential difference for King was that Communism held its ultimate belief in the state and that the means to achieving social and economic equality were vastly at odds.[86] But it is clear that King and Marx shared a critical view of capitalism's tendency toward exploitation and inequality. Even going so far as to find a similar criticism of the church with tendencies to be only "opiate of the people."[87] But perhaps most paralleled is the kind of dualism Marx speaks of with regard to religion. Recalling what was previously

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[84] King, *Strength to Love*, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN), 2010, 51
[85] King, "Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr"
[86] King, *Strength to Love,* 101
[87] Ibid, "Any religion that is concerned with the souls of men and yet is not concern with the economic and social conditions that strangle them and social conditions that cripple them is the kind that Marxists describe as the 'opiate of the people.'"

mentioned, Marx holds that religion in the democratic state, perfects the "egoist man," that exists in a kind of dualistic paradigm, where the interior and exterior life are separated. King similarly articulates this attitude with the church at large stating, "Christianity is a Sunday activity having no relevance for Monday, and the church is little more than a secular social club having a thin veneer of religiosity."[88] Without directly articulating his point, it is clear that King, unlike, Marx did not see this as Christianity or religion at all.

On this point is where King's theology and practice diverge from the theory of Marx. Marx insists that religion is a passive and reactive proclivity because of something else--namely, the circumstances of capitalism and the detriment and exploitation of within its grip. Religion is a secondary effect to the world. For King, there is a clear distinction between this kind of passive and reactive religion and the "prophetic religion" of Jeremiah the prophet (and Civil Rights protestors). The former is that which is practiced by the church at large, but especially white southern churches. For King, this is one shy step away from no religious practice at all. The religiosity of which Marx speaks is very akin to the white southern *bourgeois* religion referred to by King. Ironically however, in a certain respect, King and Marx would agree that this religion carries with it an inauthenticity because of its function as a cog in the engine of the state. Similarly, they would agree that a revolution is needed to curb the systematic inequality of the state. The central difference is that Marx's fuel and catalyst for accomplishing this is turning inward, and King's is turning upward. In the end, King and the Civil Rights Leaders proved that a transcendent religiosity can fuel a needed change in the systematic injustice of a state.

[88] Ibid., 107

The South African Council of Churches during the late 20th century anti-apartheid movement is the second example that will be examined in analyzing Marx's ideas on religion and politics. The role of organized, peaceful, civil disobedience has its roots well before the late 20th century. Mahatma Gandhi in the late 19th century led several protests against the systematic oppression of the native Indian workers. The crux of his protest was initiated by the prohibition from Indians to Transvaal.[89] Eventually Gandhi and participants were arrested for their actions. But taking workers away from the work naturally caused a lag in production, specifically in the mines where Indian workers labored.[90] An important note to this context, is that civil disobedience was only sometimes an isolated act of protest. Commonly, though, these acts were strategic moves that turned the state on its head, especially with regard to production and labor.

In the middle of the twentieth century, the policy of Apartheid confronted the church head on. The Dutch Reformed Church largely comprising the Church Congress, supported the Apartheid laws, stating that "Bantu tribes..would experience a happy and prosperous future," through the establishment of these laws.[91] No sooner had large established churches formally opposed the laws and endorsements from the government-tied church organization. However, the point at which church resistance and disobedience began to materialize was when a "mixed worship" prohibition movement was beginning to form. Churches generally decided to deliberately and formally forgo adherence to the law. In one particular instant, Archbishop Clayton had cited that he and his congregants would be disobedient to God if they were obedient to

[89] L.D., Hulley, "The Churches Civil Disobedience in South Africa," *Missionalia,* April 1993, pages 74-85
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid

the law.[92] The vehement opposition to such laws led the government to wane the attempts to formalize and enforce such laws with fidelity and scale.

However, the most predominant instances in which the church was a catalyst for organized resistance and disruption came in the 1980s. Derrick K. Hudson-Allision makes a compelling case that a two-fold strategy led to successful protest, and eventually change in government. The first being a mobilized black labor force disengaging from economic production, which stymied the South African economy. Secondly, Hudson-Allison attributes the sustenance of this labor movement through a faith-infused "prophetic expression."[93] The two strategies together, he claims, ultimately pushed the existing government to fold.

While obvious, to some degree, it should not go without noting that the Dutch Reformed Church was a major--if not necessary--ally in the apartheid government. However, church endorsed and sanctioned oppressive regimes have always existed.[94] According to the work of Charles Villa Vicencio, two distinct Western Christian traditions exist--at least in its relationship to politics and the state. The "dominant" tradition, according to Villa-Vicencio, aligns itself to the state and "will not challenge it, unless all other options are exhausted."[95] Naturally, the church has found itself actively, or passively supporting oppressive regimes.[96] The other theological framework is the "alternative tradition," which is marked by unwavering advocacy of the poor and oppressed. The tradition of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) was fueled

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[92] Ibid., 78
[93] Derick K Hudson-Allison, "The Role of Non-Violent Resistance in South Africa: Black Labor Movements and the Prophetic Church in the Spiral of the Apartheid State, 1980-1989," Princeton University, 2010
[94] Ibid., not long after the birth of Christianity Constantine made it an official state religion.
[95] Ibid., 191
[96] Villa Vencio's work largely focused on the Latin American church and regimes

by this “alternative tradition,” seeking to dispel an oppressive government regime through civil disobedience and organized resistance tactics.

Before surveying some of the concrete examples of how the black labor force and the SACC collaborated to achieve successful regime change, there’s an important point to consider in context of this larger work. There is a clear common outcome desired by both the Marxist and a Civil Rights activist (among other activists in this case); namely, the revolution of government to change laws and systems that systematically oppress the poor and disenfranchised. For Marx, this manifests in a violent overthrow of the bourgeois.”[97] A recognition of egregious oppression and exploitation of labor, the proletariat removes the bourgeois ruling class through force--much in the same way were held in their position. Through a revolution supported and energized by the church, this takes on a different form. Though often termed “non-violent,” and while the SACC did not endorse and support armed resistance, the resistance was a forceful disruption and agitation to the state. But prior to the 1980s, this was not the case. The militant branch of the African National Congress (ANC) had for thirty years prior engaged in violent tactics in an effort to secure rights and equality for blacks in South Africa.[98] Eventually however, the ANC had come to recognize the inability for this kind of movement to find success.[99] Out of this recognition was born an organized movement to non-violent resistance, which was “sustained” by the Council of Churches.

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[97] Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, pp. 98-137, ed. Samuel Moore
[98] Hudson-Allison, 192
[99] Ibid., this was in large part due to the terrain, human cost, and lack of singular voice.

The non-violent and disruptive tactics performed by the working class black population were targeted and strategic. One vital and effective non-violent tactic was massive boycotts of the black labor force. Because the South African economy was so dependent on the labor of blacks, these boycotts severely impacted the manufacturing sector in the country. Furthermore, the movement was so ubiquitous and powerful that it could not be contained or extinguished by the government.[100] Other tactics came into direct conflict with the church, coercing it directly into the political arena. Namely, conscientious objectors to military service. While the church and church denominations were more or less fluid on the role of service to the military, the infringement on the "right to religious freedom" in the form of conscientious objection, was generally held as an indispensable part of commitment to one's faith. Similarly, laws prohibiting "mixed marriages" brought the church directly into the fold of political conflict. In 1981 the Presbyterian Church formally gave ministers authority to break what was, at the time, the law of the land.[101] While these instances were not of relative significance, they are illustrative to the larger movement taking place within the role of the church in the dismantling of the apartheid government.

The SACC and church involvement at large, in the South African Revolution, was in part birthed out of the Vatican II Council, which largely emphasized pursuance of social justice, economic equality, and an overarching concern for the "poor" and disenfranchised.[102] The conviction of this council was that the catholic church has a responsibility to involve itself in the *concrete* emancipation and freedom for those

[100] Ibid, according to Hudson-Allison, a nation-wide two-day strike had such an impact on the government, that it was a singularly important part of bringing them to the negotiating table.
[101] Hulley 81.
[102] Ibid.

oppressed.[103] Hallmarks of this movement include the longstanding coined theological phrase, “preferential option for the poor.” Through this formal declaration, roots were formed which established liberation theologies often practiced, but not limited to Latin America. Two other formal theological South African influences include the Christian Institute, established by reverend Naude of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Institute for Contextual Theology. The former was established in an effort to secure support from within the Dutch White Church to find the meaning of the gospel to advocate on behalf of the poor. Naude’s conviction was that this was to be achieved through broader political participation and power granted to the black population in South Africa.[104] Finally, the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) propagated the idea that theology was “to be done in real life in the world.”[105] In other words, the church and theological convictions were most--if not only--meaningful by the ways in which it is applied in concrete liberation. The ICT not only retroactively attributed transcendent meaning to those fighting the apartheid regime, it fueled the movement up through the change of government.

The SACC, in many ways, served as an important practical and organizational pillar on which the non-violent anti-aprtheid movement could lean. The church provided shelter and food when people’s homes were demolished in the wake of government crack-downs.[106] Churches also served as important hubs for organization leaders to meet and mobilize their efforts. Furthermore, the church was also a large and visible organization that was a government threat simply by the sheer magnitude of its

[103] Allison-Hudson, 196
[104] Ibid., 197
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid, 195

influence. However, more importantly--at least in terms of the broader movement itself--the church was the invisible fuel that gave activists the will and energy to carry forth their mission. Desmund Tutu, among others, were the manifestation of the church inserting itself directly into the political area. In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech (but in many other places), Tutu says "When will we learn that human beings are of infinite value because they have been created in the image of God, and that it is a blasphemy to treat them as if they were less than this and to do so ultimately recoils on those who do this?"[107] Here, a clear and forceful notion is made that unified the non-violent anti-apartheid movement. A transcendent origin of human species reveals that unjust and unequal laws cannot be reasonable but also cannot be truly religious--something the apartheid government (and other governments, past and present) had needed to justify.

Subsequently, church leaders became the direct targets of government and the martyrs of the movement.[108] The ensuing actions only further mobilized and energized non-violent resistance against the government. The largest peace protest for several decades was led by church leaders shortly thereafter. And finally, less than two years later, the government began negotiations with the ANC, which led a government regime change in 1994.

Hudson-Allison makes a strong case that even though concrete economic circumstances give rise to, and are often ameliorate socio-political conflict, "materialistic

[107] Desmund Tutu, "Nobel Lecture," December 11, 1984, found at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1984/tutu/lecture/>
[108] Hudson-Allison, 200. Most notably, on February 29th, 1988, the Apartheid government arrested several church clergy after a service, purportedly for igniting actions against it.

determinism often slights nonmaterial motivations."[109] It is evident that the church at large in the South African Revolution was an essential component to the continuance of a successful, impactful, and longstanding protest against the government. Hudson-Allison notes that the three essential functions the church played in this way include: "institutional stability and moral authority, capacity for empowering individuals to act, and a commitment to non-violence."[110] The church acting as an important agent for *how* protest should be conducted provided an overarching ethic, which enabled the church to curtail violent resistances, for instance. Because the church is an intermediary to the transcendent, it provided the opportunity for activists to engage in activities that were not necessarily dependent on a certain outcome. If one was protesting in obedience to God and to the cause for justice, then the outcome was of secondary importance. This kind of motivating tactic enabled relentless efforts. And finally, the church maintained a commitment to non-violent strategies, which paralyzed the government from fighting against it with the forceful justification it could have, should it have been threatened with force. These together made the SACC a vital piece to the revolution.

The final and most relevant example to be explicated and analyzed is the Liberation Theology movement, most notable in Latin America. The reason this example is the most relevant is because this movement--uncoincidentally taking place during the Cold War--finds direct influence, even correlation, with Marxism. Here Latin American theologians make a strong convergence of Marx's social critique and theology. The outcome is a Theology of Liberation.[111] In this section I will diverge to examine, more

[109] Ibid., 201
[110] Ibid
[111] Often more descriptively described as a Theology of the Political

abstractly, just how these two discourses are correlated. Boff's work is especially signicant in context of the other two examples by the nature of the endeavor.

The intent of Boff's project is to more-or-less, provide a systematic voice to the work of Liberation that has been taking place. He seeks to provide an epistemological backbone to the work taking place among *active* theologies. To put it in his terms, he sets off to "capture *theology of the political's* 'material substance.'"[112] Theology's turn to the social sciences is abruptly necessitated by the brute fact of human beings' location in concrete reality, determined by historical situation and circumstance--a Marxist axiom. Jon Sobrino would describe this phenomenon as the "awaking from the sleep of inhumanity."[113] Sobrino parallels this theological movement in the same way Kant's famous work, *Critique of Pure Reason,* awoke humanity from the slumber of dogmatism. In the same fashion, in a post-Marxian era, knowledge in general--theology especially--cannot overlook the realities of the human situation in the world. Moreover, that Christians themselves find concerning the concrete realities that directly affect the "ontic potential" of human beings further necessitates a need for theology to enfold the social situation into itself.[114] However, this must be carefully, systematically, and methodologically done so that theology can operate in concrete reality but also sustain intellectual integrity. In this sense, Boff turns to the social sciences, which have already done heavy lifting in terms of effectively articulating the human situation in the world.

Boff takes measure to warn against a theology that omits a mediated dynamic between theology and the political. The theology of this kind he names as "empty

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[112] Clodovis Boff, Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations," trans. Robert Barr, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987)
[113] Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Orbis, 1994)
114 Boff

theorism." It's a theology that produces an "overabundance of signification for its own sake." It blatantly ignores the "scandal" of the poor and oppressed.[115] Elsa Tamez provides an important example of how this theological tendency operates from a biblical standpoint. She argues that the common "justification by grace through faith," should not be understood from an abstract notion of sin, but one enriched by the context of the time it was written and also contextualized for people now in the same way. She argues that the poor who first read this would not have understood the abstract notion of sin in the first place. Therefore, it is not only more theologically sound to apply this concretely than abstractly, but also more relevant. The sinner's guilt relief is not enough to address the manifestation of Latin America's "structural sin," that which is an egregious offense to God, according to Tamez.[116]

Boff strongly contends that *speculative* theology (and philosophy) is outright anachronistic. The emergence of the social sciences—which is ultimately a conscientious, introspective observance of society itself—gives name and voice to a social problem. For theology to regain a relevant and viable discourse, it, according to Boff, needs to, in one sense, envelop Marx's critique of religion and in another sense, circumvent what Marx implies is an intrinsic determination of religion (in this case, theology). This critique of religion and theology, more specifically, is relevant to Boff's project because in a strong sense, Marx and Boff have similar critiques. The difference is that Boff seeks to rescue theology from its irrelevant tendencies to ignore concrete problems of reality, where Marx holds that theology's implicit motive is to mystify the

[115] Ibid., 8-9
[116] Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Abingdon, 1996)

problems of reality in order to sustain the status quo of class power.[117] Muller mentions that liberation theology assumes an aspect of Marxian analysis of the human situation in the sense that the human being is directly and absolutely conjoined to the historical situation in which they exist. Theory is an attempt to retain the status quo through abstractionism.[118] As mentioned in Part I, Marx claims that theology has an "inverted" view of the world by approaching ultimate problems from a top-down, abstract and mystical realm, rather than from the concrete situation people faced every day.[119]

Boff's response to this critique is dynamic, or more particularly, dialectical. He understands the Marxian critique presenting social science with two conflicting realms: one based on empiricism (concerned with truth) and the other idealistic (concerned with justice).[120] Theology of the political, as one that involves and revolves around praxis, must encompass both realms. He names these distinct, but important facets "autonomous" and "dependent." Theology of the Political must operate autonomously in the sense that it abides by its law, vernacular, and rules. Its proper object is a "theoretical God;" one contemplated by theologians. Nonetheless, Theology of the Political subsumes the material rendered by the social sciences. The "believing" Christian is a historical being, situated in society, and therefore must find its material object there, too.[121] This kind of theology, to claim any sort of intellectual integrity, and to be 'pertinent', needs to be active—it needs to be "full throttle, dialectic."[122]

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[117] This was ultimately the central view adopted by Liberation Theologies across the globe, which were heavily influenced by Marxist thought.
[118] Gustavo Gutierrez, *On the Side of the Poor,* (Orbis Books: New York, NY), 2015, 65-66
[119] Marx, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*
[120] Ibid, Introduction, "Religion is the general theory of that world, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal source of consolation and justicaition."
[121] Boff, 15
[122] Ibid., 17

If, according to Boff, Theology of the Political will exist, it must consider and consult the sciences of the social, not simply 'the social.' In other words, Boff clarifies why exactly Theology of the Political is to assume a dialectical character rather than operate singularly on it's own terms.[123] His primary response, here, is that *there is no unmediated science*.[124] Theology, according to Boff, does not have at its disposal the ability to ascertain the "real" as given—what is metaphysically speaking, a divine purview. To elucidate this point, Boff constructs various "degrees" of knowledge of the real. The first consists of the divine purview just mentioned, where the real is simply given and seen directly. One degree of knowledge is the "common sense" or everyday kind of knowledge of the real. The third degree is where the sciences of the social dissect and extrapolate information of the social not immediately known. The fourth degree of knowledge is the activity (praxis) of the theology of the political.[125]

Theology cannot see itself as having direct access to the empirically 'real' or suspend itself as having a totalizing discourse. Therefore, it must rely on social analysis to provide it with "raw material." This manifests in a "constitutive" relationship between theology and the social sciences. While first theology, according to Boff, can maintain an "application" based relationship to the social sciences—that is, a relationship where each respective discipline operates independent of the other—a second theology is constitutive. It functions as interplay, where each exchanges terms and value to the other.[126] Theology of the Political—by its own name—bears this kind of relationship: Theology *of the* Political.

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[123] On this point is primarily where Liberation Theology will diverge from Marx
[124] Ibid., 21
[125] Ibid., 23
[126] Ibid., 30

Moreover, in Chapter Two Boff makes clear that theology's character is one that is active, dynamic and fluid. The constitutive relationship between the political and theology demonstrates that theology is itself a "labor of production." Second theology subsumes the objects of its inquiry and turns them theological, what Boff calls theology's "second voice."[127] This point of Boff's is imperative in making an epistemological claim. If theology is itself a movement, its epistemological nature changes. It is also notable that this bolsters theology's intellectual and academic status as a science, albeit, a different type of science. The true epistemological aim of this work is to give systematic articulation of what has been a common thread in liberation theologies hitherto. Gutierrez specifies that the divine salvation story—which was practiced in the early church and has since lost its way—is reduced when it is not considered as a part of the unfolding of history. A "guaranteeing of heaven" is not a complete picture of God's salvation.[128] Boff's project is to nuance and structure these tenets articulated among many Liberation Theology scholars.

Having established the dynamic relationship between Theology of the Political and the social sciences, Boff fends off an important and double-sided objection, namely, the "idealization of faith." One side of this objection claims that theology, when performed and practiced in the concrete world of the real, can reduce itself to political ideologies, void of the divine transcendent aspect. On the other side of this objection, however, is a potential danger of contemplative faith (first theology) to obsess itself with "transcendent" ideas, thus bracketing itself from the real world.[129] Boff's response to the

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[127] Ibid., 32
[128] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* (Orbis Books: New York, NY), 1988. Gutierrez, here, both articulates and rebuttals the Marxist claim against theology.
[129] Boff, 39

objection and danger is in line with his dialectical approach hitherto. Theology of the Political must, by definition, attend to the transcendent while simultaneously recognizing that its operative objects (human beings) are themselves situated in a concrete reality. For Boff, to present a sound epistemological theology, both a first and second theology need to work in tandem. One cannot replace the other, neither can one supersede or impose itself over the other. The danger of doing so—as has been the accusation against Liberation Theology, for example—can lead to the "ideolization of the faith." Equally dangerous, is the already iterated Marxian critique of theology (first theology), which alienates the world's concrete problems through abstraction. As Boff says, "theology of the political respects…the transcendence of faith only to the extent that it…[acknowledges] its particularity according to the particularity of its historical condition."[130]

But still, theology seems to carry with it an "absolute" or ultimate element intrinsically connected to its work. Again, Boff makes clear that in its dialectical nature, Theology of the Political operates "practically" and "theoretically," or in this case in the *essence* of faith and the *existence* of faith.[131] In a Hegelian sense, Boff does not see the various binaries of Theology of the Political in opposition. In this system (at least), they work cohesively. The absolute and abstract (essence) elements of faith express themselves in the concrete reality (existence) of faith. In reference to the question of theology's 'absolute' scope, Boff takes the following stance: "Theology is not absolute discourse. It is discourse of the Absolute."[132] Theology, as such, working in reality,

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[130] Ibid., 40
[131] Ibid., 45
[132] Ibid., 46 This same theme is mentioned in Sobrino's *Jesus in Latin America.* He argues that a contemplation and focus of Christ as the "historical Jesus is not a reduction, but rather a more accurate

extracts the limited concrete material and opens it to a vertical transcendent reality. This is how Boff adequately clarifies the objection stated above and how he refers to Theology of the Political as a "regional discourse" and universal discourse."[133]

The final chapter of Part I, Boff seeks to clearly and distinctly mark the boundaries of social sciences and theological discourse. Issuing the limitations and distinct confines of social scientific inquiry is one of two important facets of the discussion of the social-analytic mediation. In so doing, he allows each respective discourse to have its *say*, but only within the limits it ought to be producing conclusive statements. Only after establishing the precincts of sciences, can that given science be considered in total. In other words, science can be utilized by theology when theologians know science's limitations. Respectively, theologians can perform their tasks without infringing on other disciplines by claiming absolute dominion within the nature of the discourse. The theologian's positive task is to pronounce a method for the concrete human being to connect to a universal and absolute transcendence. In this final chapter of Part II, Boff articulates this important relationship.

To conclude a summary of Part I of Boff's work, it will be worth noting an important aspect of the human being with regard to Liberation Theology. Echoing Marx, Liberation Theology reworks the ontology of the human being from a theological perspective. Nowhere is this reworking taken more seriously than in Sobino's *Principal of Mercy.* Sobrino makes the strong case that "mercy" is at the heart of God's proclivity

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and appropriate portrayal of Chris as the access point to God, considering some-thing or some-one is the contemplator. In Sobrino's words, "[The historical Jesus] shows the emphasis of liberation christology on the notion that in Jesus there has appeared both God's descent to human beings and the manner of the human being's access to God." Jon Sobrino*, Jesus in Latin America* (Orbis Book: New York, NY, 1987), 16

[133] Ibid, 47

to humankind and, thus, should be mimicked by the Catholic Church.[134] Ensuring that human beings are able to fulfill their *ontic* potential is and should be the mission of the church. When Jesus was asked how one is to fulfill the greatest commandment, says Sobrino, he tells them the story of a man who has pity and "re-acts" to that suffering of another.[135] The realization of what Sobrino calls "the total human being," is the essential mission of the Christian Church. Sustaining the abstract notions of theology only serves to reify systems that "crucify" and propel and produce fragmented human beings.[136]

In concretizing the relationship between the social-analytic mediation and theology, Boff considers a "code" that this dynamic should abide by. And further, this code is governed by the principles of "autonomy" and "anti-dogmatism."[137] The former is the positive approach of the sciences, where a given discipline functions by its rules in relation to its object. The latter is the negative, or cautioned aspect, where the disciplines can speak of conclusions confined to their circles of domain. Penetrating the limits of a discipline's confines breaches the integrity of knowledge and epistemology. The example Boff provides, in relation to theology, is that of *deus ex machina:* that theology should avoid making the case for scientific miracles because it does not align with the conclusions of modern scientific discourse, and because science lies outside of theology's scope.[138] This does not mean, however, that theology is stymied, or stopped in its tracks. To Boff's point exactly, theology's labor of production, reorganizes itself—in this particular case, "demythologizes"—so that it can provide *positive* and important

[134] Sobrino, *Principal of Mercy,* 17-20
[135] Boff, 17
[136] In similar ways discussed in Marx's work
[137] Ibid., 51
[138] Ibid., 52

insights to Christian communities within its "regional discourse." In the Hegelian spirit, theology starts when, in some respects, it ends.

Furthermore, social scientific discourses cannot absolutize their statements either. According to Boff, the Marxian critique of the society is legitimate only in one sense: it's "scientific aspect." It's philosophical aspect, the "all-explaining" *Weltanschauung,* does not hold according to the code established by Boff.[139] More specifically, Marx's critique of society is useful for theologians, political scientists, and academic psychology, et al. But, for Marx's conclusions to find any sort of absolute declaration is beyond its scope. Marxism derives its conclusions on the principles that are verified in history. But history is a constant development, therefore, not allowing for an ultimate claim to be made, because, under this condition, verification is itself, ongoing.[140]

The ultimate point being that the code for the relationship between the social-analytic and Theology of the Political is carefully drawn out by Boff. Its nature is dialectical, and its purpose is both to circumscribe and to cultivate. Scientific discourse, whether theology or something different, will thrive when it's function and operation are within its particular purview. As Boff duly notes, when theology knows its limits it is a sign and signifier of the status of its "epistemological health."[141] He is doctoring a plethora of Liberation Theology that's epistemological foundation is struggling to sink its footing. Part of the reason for this will be parsed out in the final section of his work, but what makes this an especially difficult task is that Theology of the Political has a moving

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[139] Ibid., 56
[140] Marx did argue that history would end if his claims were seriously enacted—perhaps part of his solution to the problem stated.
[141] Ibid., 47

target. Theologians such as Severino Croatto and Leonardo Boff, and others discuss Liberation Theology as a movement. Croatto discusses this in terms of biblical studies having a dynamic rather than static character.[142] Leonardo Boff discusses this same phenomenon with regard to the Spirit's movement through history. That Christianity has become attuned to the cries of the poor and to render a theological articulation of attending to these cries is the challenge for theologians.[143] Clodovis Boff is making the most focused attempt in doing just that through the project at hand.

Conclusion

In conclusion of this project, I discuss two important points. The first will cover the major distinctions between Marx and "Prophetic/Contextual/Liberation Theology." Secondly, I will seek to address points in which Marx and these 'active' theologies converge. It will become apparent, against common understanding, that Marx and the religious activities in these groups had more in common than at first would be apparent.

One of Marx's strongest criticisms of religion is with regard to what he calls the inverted consciousness. Again, he contends that religion is erected to address real problems with *transcendent* (unreal) solutions, outside of the world.[144] He ultimately makes a powerful case that theology and God can be a root cause to alienation of individuals, most essentially by doubly legitimizing the positions of the oppressors and mitigating the revolt of the oppressed by sciphening distress and torment toward airy ideas about heaven and redemption. Most prominently mentioned in the "Social

[142] Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (Orbis Books: New York, NY), 1987
[143] Leonardo Boff, *Come, Holy Spirit* (Orbis Books: New York, NY), 2015
[144] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

principles of Christianity," where he claims that oppressive rulers "transfer....settlement of all infamies to heaven, and thereby justify the continuation of these infamies on earth."[145] Essentially religion for "eighteen hundred years" has used systematically abstracted liberties and rights to life from the oppressed. On the one side, it has used it to legitimize its claim and sustain its power, and on the other hand, keep the oppressed in their place through heavenly hope.[146]

However, even in this major point of divergence, Marx and Liberation Theologies both can agree on the point mentioned above. In all three stated examples, each was combating a form of religion reifying oppressive systems. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, segregationists appealed to biblical texts to support the separation (and ultimately the supremacy of whiteness)[147] In South Africa the Dutch Reformed church was the central organization purporting the continued "social order" of Aprtheid. And, Latin American Liberation Theology's anthem often cries foul against theology that does not act against real-world injustices and oppression. Therefore, in many clear respects even on this issue, religion cries foul against a distorted or perverted version of itself.

In turning to the ways in which Marx and religion converge. The first and perhaps most apparent, is the call to achieve liberation/justice in the world. Beyond this general commonality, both Marx and these religious movements took specific aim directly at the church which came alongside oppressive government powers. As mentioned above, segregationists, the Dutch Reformed Church and at times the Catholic Church in Latin America, bolstered the justification of the government--and its subsequent tactics to

[145] Marx, "Social Principles of Christianity"
[146] Raines, in his commentary here, offers a qualification regarding sympathies from Marx and Engles on religion as a catalyst of protest. In the end, he asks a fair question: "what has religion *mostly* done?"
[147] The "curse of Ham" was often a reference referred to be slave holders in the 19th century

secure its grip on power. In modern nation states, according to Marx, the production of goods through the abstraction of human labor (disconnectedness of human work from the material) is supported by "Protestantism."[148] Marx believed that the American form of Christanity was especially suited to support a kind of economic dualism, where mind and body were disparate entities. It was against this abstractionism through religion that he ultimately criticised.

Ironically, while Marx's arguments against religion were themselves quite theoretical and abstract, the late 20th century religious movements critiqued religion from within with a more intuitive and direct approach. While these movements, without question, vehemently critiqued the religious establishments that supported oppressive regimes, for the purposes of the projects, it is most important to note that they took acute aim at the structure of the system itself--i.e., capitalism. Martin Luther King Jr. did not shy away from asserting himself as a socialist economically. In his speech, "Pilgrimage to Non-violence," he says:

> The gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being, but his material well-being. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial[149]

Similarly, Contextual Theology appeals to the situated human species in the world as an intuitive basis to find liberation not only in a transcendent way, but in a real and important way on earth.

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[148]Marx, *Capital (1867),* in *Marx and Religion,* ed. John Raines, (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA), 2002, 195

[149] Martin Luther King Jr, "Pilgrimage to Non-Violence (April 13, 1960)," *Research and Education Institute,* Stanford University,

Perhaps the most important and overlooked similarity between Marx and Prophetic Religion is the role *transcendence* holds in social liberation and revolution. While obvious that this principle exists in the examples stated above, it is important to briefly summarize Boff's work, which provides Liberation Theology a systematic backbone, connecting concrete praxis and abstract theology. What Boff essentially states is that social science provides the material substance for theology's endeavors. In Boff's words, the practical drives the theoretical; "theory represents practice."[150] The dangers of theorism and abstractionism are markley voiced through Boff's work as well as other Liberation Theology writers. Together these opposition voices with Marx, more or less claim that omitting the real and concrete distress of people leads to runaway theorism--or in Marx's case abstractionism. A notable difference is that Marx believes liberation will render religion obsolete, and Liberation theology holds that liberation will fulfill religion.[151]

Less obvious is where a transcendent principle exists in Marx's writings. However, there are two points worth noting in Marx that suggests he held to an underlying, even abstract, principle. The first is the passage from *A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* in response to Marx's own hypothetical question: "From where is the *positive* possibility of German emancipation?"[152] His answer, as Mckinnon notes, is reminiscent of Hegel's Master-Slave dynamic, and deeply dialectical.[153] Marx writes:

> In the formulation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering

[150] Boff, 193
[151] King, "A Religion of Doing," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Stanford Education and Research Institute, July 4th, 1954
[152] Marx, *Introduction to A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,*
[153] Mckinnon, 10-11

> and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no historical, but only human, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete re-winning of man.[154]

In this passage, "dissolution" [*aufhebung*] is not to be understood as disregarded or eliminated, but rather, in Hegelian terms, transcended--overcome to bring about something new. The oppression and "chains" of those referred to by Marx, is discussed in the abstract and universal. In large respects the fact of the "chains" opens the imagination to a hope and outcomes that not only is without chains, but *with* something more positive and not yet manifest.

Actively working through suffering and toward realizing something new and unimagined, through hope, is an idea closely parallel to the idea of suffering and redemption found in the New Testament gospel narratives. The cross represents both real and present suffering and redemption together. The symbol of the cross carries both the idea of ultimate suffering and death, and salvation and victory over death.[155] Taken in context, this universal suffering and hope fueled a passion for prophetical religion and theologies associated with political revolution, understanding both shared hope and suffering.

It is on this principle, found both in Marx and in liberation theology, where Marx fails to fully grasp the power and foundation of religion in society. The principle of transcendence [aufhebung] discussed in Marx could have found sympathies with

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[154] Marx, *Introduction to A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,*
[155] It should not go without mentioning this it also was a political act

religious movements, and even with religious symbols. Marx adequately provides a thorough analysis and explication of religion, which directly and indirectly reifies the powers of government. But he (mostly) fails to adequately provide a competing analysis for religion that serves as a catalyst to ultimately undo these powers. Certainly, these movements do not reach the complete level of "human emancipation" which Marx had fully envisioned. They do, however, move the needle further in that direction, in way that non-religious movements had

It is not surprising then, to see Marx and his counterpart, Fredrich Engels find sympathies with the early Christians revolutionary character, which unfortunately is fragmented.[156] Marx's claims against religion and it's reinforcement of an oppressive state through faulty reasoning are, to a high degree, supported by history and contemporary manifestations of religion. However, what goes unaddressed (until potentially the very near end of his life) is that while religion does refiy systems, it can and does, at the same time, serve as an essential catalyst to social revolutions and change. Key to the energy that drives this motivation is described by Marx himself: "certainty of victory." That victory came through the act of participating in the movement toward justice, not the outcome itself. It drove protestors to non-violently work and fight through a transcendent hope.

[156] There are indications that Fredirich Engels, and Marx--by association--had developed sympathies to the early christian movement specifically. Fredrich Engels, "Introduction to Marx's Class Struggles in France (1895)," *The Revolutionary Act. Military Insurrection or Political and Economic Action*?" translated by Henry Kuhn, with an Appendix by Daniel De Leon, (New York News Company: New York, NY), 1922. Here he articulates the revolutionary nature of the early Christians against the Roman Empire. Furthermore, Marx in a letter to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis in 1881 wrote that "The dream of the imminent destruction of the world inspired the early Christians in their struggle with the Roman world empire and gave them a certainty of victory." Here we can see glimpses of Marx echoing Engle's sympathies for early Christianity's revolutionary character.

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