

# Two Men From Trier: Karl Marx (and Communism) and Caspar Olevianus (and the *Heidelberg Catechism*)

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## Two Men

Our story starts in Trier (or Trèves), a city in western Germany, close to Luxembourg. On the banks of the River Moselle and in an important wine producing region, Trier is the oldest seat of a bishop north of the Alps and may be the oldest city in Germany. It was in Trier that both Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) were born and brought up, with Marx living about 300 years after Olevianus.<sup>1</sup>

Although Olevianus and Marx wrote a number of books, they are both famous for especially one of their relatively short works. For Olevianus, it is the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563); for Marx it is *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Both had help and support from particularly one main collaborator: Karl Marx was assisted by Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) in writing *The Communist Manifesto*, while Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) co-authored the *Heidelberg Catechism* with Caspar Olevianus.<sup>2</sup>

What about their education? In their early days, it looked like both Olevianus and Marx would go into law, but this was not to be for either of them, as was the case with Martin Luther and John Calvin. Olevianus studied at

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<sup>1</sup> Trier also has links to three of the most prominent church fathers, for it is the place of Athanasius's banishment (c. 296/298-373), Ambrose's birth (c. 339-397) and Jerome's education (c. 347-420) (Caspar Olevianus, *An Exposition of the Apostles Creed*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma, intro. R. Scott Clark [Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009], p. xi).

<sup>2</sup> For a helpful discussion of the authorship of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, see Lyle D. Bierma, "The Purpose and Authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism," in Lyle D. Bierma et al, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), pp. 52-74.

three French universities (all west of Trier): Paris, Orléans and Bourges;<sup>3</sup> Marx attended three German universities (all east of Trier): Bonn, Berlin and Jena.

As regards their various fields, Marx read and wrote in the areas of philosophy, journalism, politics and economics. Olevianus worked as a theologian, preacher, and commentator on Scripture and the creeds. How did Olevianus change his vocation from law to the ministry of the Word? It came about through a vow that he made when he almost drowned in a river accident in Bourges.<sup>4</sup>

Both Marx and Olevianus had run-ins with the law. Marx was banished from various countries for his revolutionary ideas and writings, and was earlier imprisoned as a young man for drunk and disorderly conduct. Olevianus was also briefly imprisoned but it was for preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in Trier. Their respective brushes with the civil authorities saw Olevianus move to Heidelberg and Marx to London. Apart from Trier, the scene of their births and childhoods, these are the cities with which these two men are most associated.

Both Caspar Olevianus and Karl Marx changed their religions. Ethnically, Marx was a Jew, with rabbis on both sides of his parentage, especially his father's, so presumably he was circumcised. However, Karl was baptized on 26 August, 1824, aged six, after his father had converted to the Evangelical Church of Prussia, probably in order to help him in his career as a lawyer.<sup>5</sup> When about sixteen, the young Marx was confirmed in this denomination (1834). Later he became a virulent atheist. On the other hand, Caspar Olevianus was born and brought up a Roman Catholic, but by God's grace he became a Reformed Christian while at university in Orléans in France. Thus the two men never, even formally, shared the same religion, though, between them and their various stages, they covered the five main theological "options" in continental Western Europe in their days (Marx: Jew - Lutheran - atheist; Olevianus: Roman Catholic - Reformed).

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<sup>3</sup> These were the same three French universities that Calvin attended a couple of decades earlier.

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Luther swore an oath to become a monk when he was nearly struck by lightning near Stotternheim.

<sup>5</sup> The Evangelical Church of Prussia was a merger of (mostly) Lutheran and (a few) Reformed congregations under pressure from the Prussian state (1817). Basically, it was a Caesaropapist Lutheran denomination.

## Worldviews

We have surveyed some important aspects of the lives and work of these two men from Trier. Now we turn to their very different, even antithetical, worldviews. A worldview is a big picture of all things, a perspective on the whole of life, a way of conceiving reality. One's worldview includes positions on the big issues, such as, God and man, man's problem and his deliverance, work and money, private property and social class, first things and last things, etc.<sup>6</sup>

So what is the importance of Marx's ideas and worldview? Peter Watson explains,

Along with his fellow German-speaker, Adolf Hitler, Karl Marx probably had a more direct effect on the recently completed twentieth century, and the shape of the contemporary world, than any other single individual. Without him there would have been no Lenin, no Stalin, nor Mao Zedong, and few if any of the other dictators who disfigured those times. Without him there would have been no Russian Revolution ... [or the] Cold War [or] a divided Germany ... Ideas don't come any more consequential than Marxism.<sup>7</sup>

Peter Singer notes Marx's immense influence on huge proportions of the world's population and compares his significance to that of religious leaders, especially the Lord Jesus Christ:

Marx's impact can only be compared with that of religious figures like Jesus or Muhammed. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, nearly four [out] of every ten people on earth lived under governments that considered themselves Marxist and claimed ... to use Marxist principles to decide how the nation should be run. In these countries Marx was a kind of secular Jesus; his writings were the ultimate source of truth and authority; his image was everywhere reverently

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<sup>6</sup> For a summary and analysis of the history of the idea of worldview in the last two centuries and more, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Watson, *The German Genius* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 819.

displayed. The lives of hundreds of millions of people have been deeply affected by Marx's legacy.<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty for us as Christians lies not in understanding the biblical worldview of Olevianus and the Reformed faith, but that of Karl Marx and communism. First of all, Marxism is a massive and complicated subject. There are also problems with Marx's own writings, for he is not systematic and not always clear or consistent. He is also especially given to hurling opprobrium at his opponents.<sup>9</sup>

These serious deficiencies have been widely recognized by scholars on both sides of the Atlantic and across the spectrum of political, philosophical and religious views. Sir Isaiah Berlin, a Latvian-born British intellectual and a fairly even-handed biographer, observes, "[Marx's] writing was often clumsy, overcharged and obscure."<sup>10</sup> Gary North, an American Christian Reconstructionist and a sharp critic, states, "In the history of scholarship, there has been no more sarcastic, vitriolic writer than Karl Marx."<sup>11</sup>

There are other difficulties. In editing and introducing many of Marx's works, did Engels always represent his views correctly?<sup>12</sup> What about the many strands of Marxism and their outworkings? These include the developments of Marxism in the USSR (e.g., Leninism and Stalinism), the Warsaw Pact nations of central and Eastern Europe, communism in Africa, the Korean and Vietnam wars, China and N. Korea? What about the contemporary threat of neo-Marxism or cultural Marxism in the West?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Isaiah Berlin: "Marx ... like many dedicated intellectuals, was himself haunted by a perpetual feeling of insecurity, and was morbidly thin-skinned and jealously suspicious of the least signs of antagonism to his person or his doctrines" (*Karl Marx*, 5th ed. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011], p. 95).

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, *Karl Marx*, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Fort Worth, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Terrell Carver, "Karl Marx: Gravedigger of the Capitalist Class," in Brian Redhead (intro.), *Political Thought From Plato to NATO* (London: BBC Books, 1984), pp. 169-170. Engels was also more "concerned about worldview" than Marx and sought to work out "the implications of the materialist worldview for all the important fields of knowledge," including the sciences (Naugle, *Worldview*, pp. 234, 235).

<sup>13</sup> For a recent short critique, see Melvin Tinker, *That Hideous Strength: How the West Was Lost*

Important as these things are, much of the above lies outside the focus of this article. For our purposes, we will concentrate on the main issues in the contrasting worldviews of Marx's unbelieving communism versus Olevianus and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Over against the foolish ideas of a dead philosopher, we will consider the invincible truth of the living God and the glory of the biblical and Reformed faith of our Lord Jesus Christ!

## God (Theology)

Karl Marx was a dogmatic atheist whose atheism was foundational to his thinking. He was an evolutionist before Charles Darwin's *Origins of the Species* (1859), which merely served to strengthen Marx's unbelief and support his communist theory of class struggle, the conflict of interests between the workers and the ruling class in capitalist societies. As Marx himself put it, "Darwin's book is very important and serves me as a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history."<sup>14</sup> However, the oft-repeated story that Marx offered to dedicate the second edition of his *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin appears to be false, though Marx did admire him and sent him a complimentary copy of the first volume of this work.<sup>15</sup> Henry Morris is correct: "Marx and Engels were doctrinaire evolutionists, and so have all communists been ever since. Since atheism is a basic tenet of Marxism ... it is obvious that evolution must be the number one tenet of communism."<sup>16</sup>

Even for an ardent atheist evolutionist, Marx was vehemently anti-Christian. He declared, "The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man."<sup>17</sup> In the preface to his doctoral thesis on two ancient materialist philosophers, he proclaimed,

Philosophy [especially Marx's own philosophy] makes no secret of it. The proclamation of Prometheus—in a word, I

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(Welwyn Garden City: EP Books, 2018). The following explanatory words are found under the title on the front cover: "the cancer of cultural Marxism in the church, the world and the gospel of change."

<sup>14</sup> Marx, *Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle* (16 January, 1861).

<sup>15</sup> Berlin, *Karl Marx*, p. 232, n. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Morris, *The Long War Against God* (Green Forest, AZ: Master Books, 2008), p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843).

detest all the gods—is her own profession, her own slogan against all the gods of heaven and earth who do not recognise man’s self-consciousness as the highest divinity. There shall be no other beside it.<sup>18</sup>

Gordon Clark explains that “Marx considered even [Ludwig] Feuerbach [best known for his claim that God is merely the apotheosis of man] to be too Christian. Though Feuerbach’s influence on Marx was so great, he did not hesitate to call him a sheep in wolves’ clothing.”<sup>19</sup> B. A. G. Fuller states that, for Marx, “Christianity had to be extirpated root and branch ... the world-revolution must be anti-theistic in general and anti-Christian in particular.”<sup>20</sup>

This brings us to perhaps Karl Marx’s most famous one-liner: “Religion is the opium of the people,” which is usually translated as, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” To provide some context, we quote Marx more fully: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness.”<sup>21</sup>

In the nineteenth century, people would primarily identify opium as a pain killer, whereas most in the twenty-first century would think first of all of recreational drugs. Marx is claiming that religion creates the illusion of relief for desperate people without actually addressing their problems.

What he says is true as regards *false* religion, such as Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, Islam, the cults, etc., as well as secular religions, like Marxism itself. Psychologically, all false religions provide some sort of consolation, hope and meaning for their devotees in the midst of their struggles. The lie in Marx’s statement is that he applies it to *all* religion, including and especially the saving truth of the Triune God as set forth in the inspired Scriptures.

Contrary to Marx’s slander of the gospel, the child of God has real substantive comfort and consolation by God’s grace. These are the opening words of

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* (1841). Olevianus also earned a doctorate; his was awarded in 1557.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1989), p. 480.

<sup>20</sup> B. A. G. Fuller, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1948), II:377.

<sup>21</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843).

the *Heidelberg Catechism*, co-authored by Casper Olevianus:

Q. 1. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

A. That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

All believers confess the first line of the *Apostles' Creed*: "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 26). The Reformer from Trier expands upon this glorious profession of the truth:

17 Q. You say, "I believe in God." What is the meaning of that little word "God"?

A. God is the highest good, the source of everything good. He gives us body and soul, life, and everything else. He is the Father, His only Son, and the Holy Spirit: one, eternal, spiritual being; prudent, truthful, good, pure, just, merciful, free, almighty. He has revealed himself to us through His Word as the one who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them and preserves them.<sup>22</sup>

Turning to the Decalogue, the *Heidelberg Catechism* explains man's duty to the Triune God:

Q. 94. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul ... learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him; expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with

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<sup>22</sup> Caspar Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), p. 14.

my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures,  
rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will.

## Man (Anthropology)

Next we move from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of man. As regards man's "constitution," for Marx, man is purely material. Thus communism is committed to the philosophy of materialism, with all the insuperable problems that that philosophy entails. Man is merely matter in motion (like everything else), evolved slime. After all, Marx is an atheist *evolutionist*, as we have seen. Following Scripture, Caspar Olevianus sees man as consisting of both body and soul or spirit, so that human beings are not merely physical or material.

What about the "essence" of man? What makes him quintessentially human? For Darwin, man is essentially a biological being. For rationalists, like René Descartes, man is above all things a rational entity. Aristotle emphasized that man is fundamentally political. Others view the essence of man as sexual or social. At this point, the thought of atheist philosopher Karl Marx becomes more distinctive. For him, the essence of man is that he works; man is principally an *economic* being. Marx's position is, however, simplistic and far too narrow to do justice to man's many-sided nature.

In accordance with the Lord's inspired Word, Olevianus understands that man is necessarily religious. Man was originally made in God's image, so his primary duty and calling is towards the Most High. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* puts it, "God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him" (A. 6). Under this principle and within this framework, man is a biological and rational creature, an economic and political entity, a social and sexual being.

## Man's Problem (Hamartiology)

Every worldview recognizes that something is wrong with man and his world. For Karl Marx, since man is primarily an economic being, the problem lies with his work and his economic systems.



Here we need to explain a technical philosophical word: alienation. Something is alien if it is foreign or strange. Alienation is the process by which something becomes alien or foreign or strange, so that man feels or senses or is aware that something is wrong.

For Marx and his followers, man's problem is his *economic* alienation. William D. Dennison explains the Marxist and communist view of [1] positive work and [2] negative work:

[1] As long as human labor freely creates an object in the immediate sense to satisfy physical need, the human being remains within the unity of the essence of societal species-being. [2] But once human labor creates an object for the physical subsistence of one's own economic use, the person becomes a slave in bondage to the object placing the laborer in an antagonistic relationship with nature and self (the human's fall from innocence).<sup>23</sup>

Not only does capitalism alienate the worker from the object that is produced and the self that produces, but it also creates alienation between the worker and other human beings, as well as society itself. Marx's concept of alienation, as Peter Watson summarizes,

originated in labor and had four defining aspects: (1) labor is no longer the worker's own under capitalism, it is an alien entity, dominating him; (2) the very act of production alienates the worker from his own nature—he becomes less than a man; (3) the needs of the market—and of the factory—estrange men from other men; and (4) from his surrounding culture.<sup>24</sup>

According to Marx, alienation increases as the division of labour increases, with some working as farmers or shop owners, others becoming painters or dentists, and yet others in the roles of bankers or industrialists, etc. Alienation also grows as private property increases. All this generates class conflict between employees and employers. As *The Communist Manifesto* declares, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

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<sup>23</sup> William D. Dennison, *Karl Marx* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> Watson, *The German Genius*, p. 252.

Communist theory contrasts the proletariat and the bourgeoisie who are engaged in the class struggle. The proletariat or working class are those who do not own the tools of production and whose only income is through the sale of their labour. The bourgeoisie or capitalists own the tools of production and pay others to work for them. According to Karl Marx, the bourgeoisie are evil oppressors who exploit the proletariat!

In short, there is a lot of economic alienation in our world, according to Marxism: alienation within the worker, between the worker and the object he makes, between all human beings over the division of labour, between the classes and through all historical societies!

What are we to make of all this? First, we observe that these Marxist views are very difficult to understand. Second, there is no historical record anywhere of any fall from an original classless society; this is pure myth. Third, it is too limited for it does not acknowledge all the evils of our world. Fourth, it is reductionist for all of these ills cannot be explained merely by economic factors.

The true explanation of the origin of the miseries of man and the problems of his world is the fall of our first parents into sin. This is the first alienation in human history and the alienation that is foundational for all the others, for which sinful and foolish men substitute other alienations (cf. Rom. 1:18).

The teaching of Olevianus and the Reformed faith is summarized in the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

Q. 7. Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise; hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin.

Q. 8. Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?

A. Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.

Clearly, man's most basic problem is much bigger than that diagnosed by Karl Marx, and it has far more effects in history and eternity than he ever imagined! Moreover, man's work problems are not the cause but effects of man's fall, as Genesis 3:17-19 relates,

And unto Adam he [i.e., God] said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

The chief effect of man's sin is guilt before Almighty God. As those represented by Adam, our federal or covenant head, the human race (Christ only excepted) sinned in him (Rom. 5:12-21). Thus all are conceived and born totally depraved by God's just judgment (Ps. 51:5; 58:3). Among the many dreadful effects of man's fall and sinfulness upon his body, including his brain, are physical weakness and sickness, mental limitations and decay, dying and death.

The Lord Jesus lists "evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" as coming "from within," proceeding out of the "evil" "heart of man" (Mark 7:21-23). This is an inspired description of fallen man penned by the apostle Paul:

filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful (Rom. 1:29-31).

Thus, with reference to Karl Marx and communism, there are greedy rich and envious poor, and envious rich and greedy poor, for both rich and poor share the same fallen nature. Besides, humanity is not simply divided into the bourgeois "haves" and the proletarian "have-nots." There are many degrees of material wealth, and some people rise in income and class, whereas others decline in income and class. The only thing that is constant in man in this world is his native total depravity (Rom. 3:9-18)!

It is our fallen nature and sin that brings conflict within and between individuals, within and between families, within and between classes, and within and between nations, as well as in the workplace. This conflict is occasioned by, and involves, the interplay of all sorts of factors: personal, historical, ethnic, political, economic, social, etc.

“Hold on a minute!” some might protest, “Doesn’t the Bible say, ‘Money is the root of all evil’? So doesn’t Scripture itself teach that economic factors are the source of all our problems?”

First, God’s Word actually says that “the *love* of money is the root of all evil” (I Tim. 6:10). Second, “all” here does not refer to each and every sin absolutely. Adam’s eating the forbidden fruit was not for economic reasons, nor is the squabble between two infants over the use of a ball. The Yorkshire Ripper and Jeffrey Dahmer did not murder for money. The truth is that “the love of money is the root of all [sorts or kinds of] evil.” The love of money is an instance of covetousness, the sin against the tenth commandment, and it has been, is and will be the source of a vast variety of transgressions against all of the other nine commandments.

Moreover, the division of labour is not per se evil. The biblical and Reformed doctrine here is that of *calling*. Whether a believer is an employer or an employee, a member of the bourgeoisie or of the proletariat, a bricklayer or a stockbroker, he is a servant of Jesus Christ and must work to God’s glory (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1).

Olevianus summarizes the Reformation’s teaching in the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

- Q. 125. Which is the fourth petition [of the Lord’s Prayer]?  
 A. Give us this day our daily bread; that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge Thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without Thy blessing; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone in Thee.

The word “industry” speaks of our work, in connection with which all sorts of economic factors arise—always under Jehovah’s all-encompassing provi-

dence. Over against the materialism of Marx's evolutionary atheism, God's "blessing" upon us through Jesus Christ is crucial in all of our work and with all of our earthly goods.

## **Man's Deliverance (Soteriology)**

According to Karl Marx and communism, wherein lies man's salvation or deliverance? Their answer is distinctive: the proletariat or working class! The industrial workers will save the world; the proletariat will be cosmic deliverers!

Before they arise to bring salvation to humanity, the proletariat must first be converted to communist ideas. This will happen as they become more and more downtrodden by the greedy capitalists, making them more and more ready to believe, understand, embrace and fulfil the lofty salvific role assigned to them by Karl Marx. As the philosopher from Trier pithily expressed it, "Just as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy."<sup>25</sup>

After their communist conversion, the proletariat will rebel against their tyrannical bourgeois masters with physical weapons. Their revolution will be violent and bloody.<sup>26</sup> *The Communist Manifesto* is explicit:

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained *only by the forcible overthrow* of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working Men of All Countries, Unite!

Friedrich Engels understood this to be the goal and motivation of his old friend: "Marx was before all else a revolutionary. His real mission in life was to contribute in one way or another to the overthrow of capitalist society."<sup>27</sup>

This led Karl Marx to redefine the traditional role of a philosopher: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point

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<sup>25</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844).

<sup>26</sup> North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>27</sup> Engels, *Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx* (17 March, 1883).

however is to change it.”<sup>28</sup> Changing the world—as subsequent history bears eloquent testimony—includes using such means as whipping up angry mobs, bloody coups, civil wars, political assassinations, etc.

In short, Marx’s gospel of salvation is all of man, whether in the form of the proletariat or of the philosophers, like himself, who teach the labouring classes their role. Deliverance comes by man’s (rebellious) will and by man’s (violent) works. This could be presented by way of a simple chart:

*Marx’s Man-Centred Salvation*

Saviour = proletariat

Conversion = proletariat believing their role

Good Works = proletariat bringing bloody revolution

The teaching of that faithful servant of God, Caspar Olevianus in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, is so different: Christ alone is our Saviour and deliverer!

Q. 18. Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God and a real righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Q. 29. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, a Savior?

A. Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.<sup>29</sup>

So look only to Jesus: His works, His sufferings and His struggles, because His atoning sacrifice brings reconciliation with the God of all glory through the forgiveness of sins! Christ and His salvation are not achieved or received by our will or works, but through grace alone and by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Only after we are converted do we perform good works and even then they are performed *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, according to Jehovah’s eternal decree: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

<sup>28</sup> Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845).

<sup>29</sup> For a study of Olevianus’ doctrine of covenantal salvation, embracing both justification and sanctification in the Lord Jesus, see R. Scott Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2005).

Caspar Olevianus in the *Heidelberg Catechism* identifies from Scripture the three key elements in good works:

Q. 91. But what are good works?

A. Only those which [1] proceed from a true faith, [2] are performed according to the law of God, and [3] to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men.

As a consistent biblical theist, Olevianus insists that only the living God can define a good work, not the vain “imagination” of philosophers, like Karl Marx, or “the institutions of men,” like communist parties or the left-wing media. The *Heidelberg Catechism* speaks of good works with regard to “the powers that be” (Rom. 13:1) in the home and all other spheres, including the workplace and the state:

Q. 104. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

“All in authority over me” includes my employer and the civil government. The Most High is sovereign for “it pleases God to govern us by their hand.” Our calling is to “submit” to them, render them “due obedience” and “patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities” for His sake. Stirring up the proletariat or engaging in bloody revolution are not good works according to the fifth commandment, but “works of the flesh” and “they which do such things [such as Marxist agitators] shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21).

## **Good Society (Ecclesiology)**

In the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Olevianus defines the “good society” or the people who are blessed and virtuous as the church of the living God.

Q. 54. What believest thou concerning the “holy catholic church” of Christ?

A. That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.

This is, of course, a simple biblical exposition of the church's four attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, as confessed in the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (325, 381): "I believe one, holy, catholic and apostolic church."

What is it to be "apostolic" or to hold the right doctrines according to Karl Marx and his followers? The communist equivalent of the church's apostolicity is believing and maintaining the tenets of Marx, Engels and their successors in their various writings, manifestoes, confessions and catechisms. British historian and life-long Marxist, Eric Hobsbawm speaks of this in the context of the former USSR: "The simple, unqualified, dogmatic catechisms to which he [i.e., Stalin] reduced 'Marxism-Leninism' were ideal for introducing ideas to the first generation of illiterates."<sup>30</sup> In a totalitarian communist country, Marxist indoctrination is the work especially of the state propaganda and the state education system.

According to communism, an individual, society or country is "holy" in so far as it is devoted or consecrated to Marxist ideas. Think here, for example, of Lenin's fervour or the communist zealots in the Vietnam War (1955-1975).

The communist counterpart to the church's "catholicity" is its internationalism. *The Communist Manifesto* presents both the basis of its internationalism ("The proletariat has no country") and the calling of its internationalism ("Working Men of All Countries, Unite!"). In other words, the proletariat of all countries are essentially one (whether they realize it or not). They must gain self-consciousness, unite across national boundaries, oppose nationalism, overthrow capitalism and advance the cause of world communism.

This impulse took institutional form in the International Working Men's Association or the First International (1864-1876), of which Karl Marx was among the founders, and then the Second International (1889-1916). After

<sup>30</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2010), p. 390.



the formation of the Soviet Union, it organized and dominated the Communist International (Comintern, 1919-1935) and the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform, 1947-1956).

According to Marxist theory, “unity” is both a present reality, in the essential unity of the proletariat and the ideological unity of communists, and a future hope since communism will take over the whole world.

Necessarily, there is also a difference regarding the reality and the callings of the two communities: Christ's church and communist societies. For Olevianus, as a faithful advocate of biblical and Reformed doctrine, the church essentially is one, holy, catholic and apostolic by the decree of God, the redemption of the Son and the operation of the Holy Spirit. The calling of the church is to manifest the unity, catholicity, apostolicity and holiness that she already has in Christ. This includes the work of church edification and reformation, and evangelism, through preaching and catechizing, sacramental administration and church discipline, worship and fellowship, prayer and witnessing, etc.

Now, over two centuries after Karl Marx's birth, the world and communism are not what his writings desired or predicted.<sup>31</sup> He would say that revolution—ongoing revolution—is more necessary than ever!

## **Final State (Eschatology)**

For Karl Marx and communism, the final state will be a workers' paradise. There will be no alienation and man's labour will always be satisfying. Everyone will be equal and have plenty, without any private property. A perfect brotherhood of man will exist with no more class conflict because there will no longer be any classes. A beautiful global harmony among all of humanity will be enjoyed.

Diarmaid MacCulloch's analysis is correct: Karl Marx's “vision of the inevitable consummation, in what he termed the dictatorship of the proletariat, was no less a prophetic and apocalyptic vision than anything that Christianity had

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<sup>31</sup> In his *Historiography: Secular and Religious* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1994), Gordon H. Clark points out some of the falsified prophecies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (pp. 79-83), as well as their theory's inability to explain history (pp. 83-97).

produced in its two millennia.”<sup>32</sup> English philosopher and author of *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1927), Bertrand Russell astutely observed, “Marx professed himself an atheist but retained a cosmic optimism which only theism could justify.”<sup>33</sup> On this, at least, Russell was right!

Eric Hobsbawm identifies the motivation of Joseph Stalin, history’s most powerful European communist: “His terrifying career makes no sense except as a stubborn, unbroken pursuit of that utopian aim of a communist society to whose reassertion he devoted the last of his publications, a few months before his death.”<sup>34</sup> Yet Marx’s godless utopia has still not arrived and it never will.<sup>35</sup>

Instead, we have witnessed the dissolution of the USSR and of communism in the Warsaw Pact countries, like Poland and Czechoslovakia.<sup>36</sup> The misery of the Soviet Union includes devastating famines, cruel dekulakization, repeated

<sup>32</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (USA: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 816.

<sup>33</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 754.

<sup>34</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 390.

<sup>35</sup> The communist utopia predicted falsely by Karl Marx shares several similarities with the kingdom of the beast prophesied truly by the Holy Spirit, for both are future, global, anti-Christian societies to be brought in by deception (II Thess. 2:4, 9-12; Rev. 13:14; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10). However, unlike communism’s supposed earthly paradise, the realm of the man of sin will not be classless (Rev. 6:15; 13:16; 17:12; 18:3, 9-23). Nor will there be universal peace and prosperity, since, without the mark or the name or the number of the beast, none will be able to buy or sell (Rev. 13:16-18), and Christians will be persecuted and killed (Rev. 13:6-7, 10, 15). Nor will all religious adoration be removed from the earth, for the beast will be worshipped (II Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:3-4, 8, 12, 14-15; 16:2; 19:20), and the oppressed elect will continue to honour and praise the living God. Perhaps even more contrary to the theories of the anti-supernaturalist communists, real miracles will accompany the son of perdition (II Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13-15; 16:13-14; 19:20). Neither the communist utopia (which will never begin) nor the beast’s anti-Christian kingdom (which will) is everlasting. Instead, “the Lord shall consume [the man of sin] with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy [him] with the brightness of his [second] coming” (II Thess. 2:8). Christ will “take away his dominion” (Dan. 7:26) and “smite the nations” (Rev. 19:15). Then “the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Dan. 7:27).

<sup>36</sup> Given Karl Marx’s predictive system and aversions, it is doubly ironic that it was precisely these European nations and not others that became communist. First, Marx claimed that central and eastern Europe were not developed enough to be ready for the stage of communist governments. Second, Marx, born in German Trier, “always despised the Slavs” (Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 748).

purges, degrading gulags, brutal thuggery, show trials, terrible paranoia, etc.<sup>37</sup> We could add to this the poverty brought upon N. Korea, Cuba and Venezuela because of Marxist economic policies, besides the hypocrisy of communist leaders, such as Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu, who built for himself a palace in Bucharest larger than French King Louis XIV's Versailles, and Erich Honecker with his stags in his own private hunting residence in East Germany. David Horowitz gives this accurate summary:

[Marxism] is a religion, but it's a religion in which the promise is not in the next world but in this world. And then, when you look and see what radicals do and what the actual record is, you see that in the name of some future paradise, they create hell on earth.<sup>38</sup>

There was much more substance to the concerns and troubled premonitions of Heinrich Marx (1777-1838), Karl's father, regarding his son and his thinking, than to the philosopher's prophecies of a future communist golden age:

And yet at times I cannot rid myself of ideas which arouse in me sad forebodings and fear when I am struck as if by lightning by the thought: is your heart in accord with your head, your talents? Has it room for the earthly but gentler sentiments which in this vale of sorrow are so essentially consoling for a man of feeling? And since that heart is obviously animated and governed by a demon not granted to all men, is that demon heavenly or Faustian?<sup>39</sup>

Heinrich, like many a father, understood the weaknesses of his (19-year-old) son. Sadly, Karl's character (as well as his ideas and effect upon the world) turned out to be a lot worse than Heinrich feared. Thus the answer to the father's last question in the quote above is that the supernatural influence upon Karl Marx was definitely not from above but from below (cf. James 3:15).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf., e.g., Martin Amis' critique of Stalin and his legacy: *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* (New York: Hyperion, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Heinrich Marx, *Letter to Karl Marx* (2 March, 1837).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution*, pp. xx-xxi.

Karl Marx professed an absolute (but demonic) certainty that his supposedly wonderful classless society would come inevitably and soon. As the “truly scientific philosophy,” communism claims to be “characterized by science’s traditional claims to objectivity, rationality, universality, and certainty.”<sup>41</sup> This alleged scientific certainty extends even to Marxist eschatology!

Embracing communism’s historical materialism, millions of Marx’s loyal followers have likewise been assured of his glorious future utopia. In 1983, Philip Foner wrote, “I am confident that when the two hundredth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx will be observed [in 2083], the entire world will be socialist [i.e., communist].”<sup>42</sup> After the devastation and failure of Marx’s views wherever they have been implemented, few are so sanguine today. More than two centuries after the birth of Karl Marx, only a very small percentage of the global map would be coloured red for communism. China, the vast majority of the red world in our day, does not even practise the economic theories of the man from Trier!

Over against all atheism, evolutionism and communism, the hope of Olevianus and Reformed Christians is the second coming of the Lord Jesus, as expressed in the *Apostles’ Creed* and developed in the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

Q. 52. What comfort is it to thee that “Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead”?

A. That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

Thus we pray for the coming of the kingdom of God in this world and its perfection in the next, as Olevianus explains in the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

Q. 123. Which is the second petition [of the Lord’s Prayer]?

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<sup>41</sup> Naugle, *Worldview*, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Dave Breese, *Seven Men Who Rule the World From the Grave* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990), p. 58.

A. Thy kingdom come; that is, rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy church; destroy the works of the devil and all violence which would exalt itself against Thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word; till the full perfection of Thy kingdom take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.

Though the content of their hopes are radically opposed, both Karl Marx and Caspar Olevianus professed assurance that they would be fulfilled. The latter expressed this confidence beautifully:

With my eyes turned to the heavens and my heart at peace in all distress, persecution, and rumors of war, I believe in and await the coming of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ [Titus 2:13]. I am fully confident that as He came the first time to earn our salvation, He will come again to impart to us the full fruit and enjoyment of that salvation He earned, in order that, as it is written, “having now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved from wrath by his life. For if when we were still enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5[:9, 10]).<sup>43</sup>

Whereas Marx’s certitude rested on his alleged scientific method (and his own resolute will), Olevianus’ assurance of future bliss in the new world came by the internal testimony of the Spirit of Christ through the Word of God.<sup>44</sup> As the opening answer to the *Heidelberg Catechism* states, “by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life.” Unlike that of Marx and communism, this is the “hope [that] maketh not ashamed” (Rom. 5:5)!<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation*, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the Trier theologian’s teaching on the certainty of faith, see “Caspar Olevianus on Assurance” ([www.cprc.co.uk/quotes/olevianus-on-assurance](http://www.cprc.co.uk/quotes/olevianus-on-assurance)).

<sup>45</sup> The speech which was the origin of this article is available on-line in both audio and video formats ([www.cprc.co.uk/lectures-interviews-debates](http://www.cprc.co.uk/lectures-interviews-debates)).