

Marx
Engels
Lenin



Socialism and
Religion

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Religion**

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Index

- 3 Lenin: *Socialism and Religion*
- 9 Marx: extract from
*Contribution to the Critique of
Hegel's Philosophy of Law*
- 11 Engels: extract from
Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity
- 18 Engels: extract from
The Book of Revelation
- 25 Engels: extracts from
On the History of Early Christianity
Chapters 1 and 3

Lenin

Socialism and Religion

Present-day society is wholly based on the exploitation of the vast masses of the working class by a tiny minority of the population, the class of the landowners and that of the capitalists. It is a slave society, since the “free” workers, who all their life work for the capitalists, are “entitled” only to such means of subsistence as are essential for the maintenance of slaves who produce profit, for the safeguarding and perpetuation of capitalist slavery.

The economic oppression of the workers inevitably calls forth and engenders every kind of political oppression and social humiliation, the coarsening and darkening of the spiritual and moral life of the masses. The workers may secure a greater or lesser degree of political liberty to fight for their economic emancipation, but no amount of liberty will rid them of poverty, unemployment, and oppression until the power of capital is overthrown.

Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, overburdened by their perpetual work for others, by want and isolation. Impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the exploiters just as inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death as impotence of the savage in his battle with nature gives rise to belief in gods, devils, miracles, and the like.

Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be

submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward.

But those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practise charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to well-being in heaven.

Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.

But a slave who has become conscious of his slavery and has risen to struggle for his emancipation has already half ceased to be a slave. The modern class-conscious worker, reared by large-scale factory industry and enlightened by urban life, contemptuously casts aside religious prejudices, leaves heaven to the priests and bourgeois bigots, and tries to win a better life for himself here on earth.

The proletariat of today takes the side of socialism, which enlists science in the battle against the fog of religion, and frees the workers from their belief in life after death by welding them together to fight in the present for a better life on earth.

Religion must be declared a private affair. In these words socialists usually express their attitude towards religion. But the meaning of these words should be accurately defined to prevent any misunderstanding.

We demand that religion be held a private affair so far as the state is concerned. But by no means can we consider religion a private affair so far as our Party is concerned.

Religion must be of no concern to the state, and religious societies must have no connection with governmental authority. Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases, or no religion

whatever, i.e., to be an atheist, which every socialist is, as a rule.

Discrimination among citizens on account of their religious convictions is wholly intolerable. Even the bare mention of a citizen's religion in official documents should unquestionably be eliminated. No subsidies should be granted to the established church nor state allowances made to ecclesiastical and religious societies. These should become absolutely free associations of like-minded citizens, associations independent of the state.

Only the complete fulfilment of these demands can put an end to the shameful and accursed past when the church lived in feudal dependence on the state, and Russian citizens lived in feudal dependence on the established church, when medieval, inquisitorial laws (to this day remaining in our criminal codes and on our statute books) were in existence and were applied, persecuting men for their belief or disbelief, violating men's consciences, and linking cosy government jobs and government-derived incomes with the dispensation of this or that dope by the established church. Complete separation of Church and State is what the socialist proletariat demands of the modern state and the modern church.

The Russian revolution must put this demand into effect as a necessary component of political freedom. In this respect, the Russian revolution is in a particularly favourable position, since the revolting officialism of the police-ridden feudal autocracy has called forth discontent, unrest and indignation even among the clergy.

However abject, however ignorant Russian Orthodox clergymen may have been, even they have now been awakened by the thunder of the downfall of the old, medieval order in Russia. Even they are joining in the demand for freedom, are protesting against bureaucratic practices and officialism, against the spying for the police imposed on the "servants of God".

We socialists must lend this movement our support, carrying the demands

of honest and sincere members of the clergy to their conclusion, making them stick to their words about freedom, demanding that they should resolutely break all ties between religion and the police.

Either you are sincere, in which case you must stand for the complete separation of Church and State and of School and Church, for religion to be declared wholly and absolutely a private affair. Or you do not accept these consistent demands for freedom, in which case you evidently are still held captive by the traditions of the inquisition, in which case you evidently still cling to your cosy government jobs and government-derived incomes, in which case you evidently do not believe in the spiritual power of your weapon and continue to take bribes from the state. And in that case the class-conscious workers of all Russia declare merciless war on you.

So far as the Party of the socialist proletariat is concerned, religion is not a private affair. Our Party is an association of class-conscious, advanced fighters for the emancipation of the working class. Such an association cannot and must not be indifferent to lack of class-consciousness, ignorance or obscurantism in the shape of religious beliefs. We demand complete disestablishment of the Church so as to be able to combat the religious fog with purely ideological and solely ideological weapons, by means of our press and by word of mouth. But we founded our association, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, precisely for such a struggle against every religious bamboozling of the workers. And to us the ideological struggle is not a private affair, but the affair of the whole Party, of the whole proletariat.

If that is so, why do we not declare in our Programme that we are atheists? Why do we not forbid Christians and other believers in God to join our Party?

The answer to this question will serve to explain the very important difference in the way the question of religion is presented by the bourgeois democrats and the Social-Democrats.

Our Programme is based entirely on the scientific, and moreover the materialist, world outlook. An explanation of our Programme, therefore, necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog. Our propaganda necessarily includes the propaganda of atheism; the publication of the appropriate scientific literature, which the autocratic feudal government has hitherto strictly forbidden and persecuted, must now form one of the fields of our Party work.

We shall now probably have to follow the advice Engels once gave to the German Socialists: to translate and widely disseminate the literature of the eighteenth-century French Enlighteners and atheists.¹

But under no circumstances ought we to fall into the error of posing the religious question in an abstract, idealistic fashion, as an “intellectual” question unconnected with the class struggle, as is not infrequently done by the radical democrats from among the bourgeoisie.

It would be stupid to think that, in a society based on the endless oppression and coarsening of the worker masses, religious prejudices could be dispelled by purely propaganda methods. It would be bourgeois narrow-mindedness to forget that the yoke of religion that weighs upon mankind is merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society.

No number of pamphlets and no amount of preaching can enlighten the proletariat, if it is not enlightened by its own struggle against the dark forces of capitalism. Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven.

That is the reason why we do not and should not set forth our atheism in our Programme; that is why we do not and should not prohibit proletarians who still retain vestiges of their old prejudices from associating themselves with our Party. We shall always preach the scientific world outlook, and it is essential for us to combat the inconsistency of various “Christians”. But that does not mean in the least that the religious question ought to be

advanced to first place, where it does not belong at all; nor does it mean that we should allow the forces of the really revolutionary economic and political struggle to be split up on account of third-rate opinions or senseless ideas, rapidly losing all political importance, rapidly being swept out as rubbish by the very course of economic development.

Everywhere the reactionary bourgeoisie has concerned itself, and is now beginning to concern itself in Russia, with the fomenting of religious strife – in order thereby to divert the attention of the masses from the really important and fundamental economic and political problems, now being solved in practice by the all-Russia proletariat uniting in revolutionary struggle.

This reactionary policy of splitting up the proletarian forces, which today manifests itself mainly in Black-Hundred pogroms, may tomorrow conceive some more subtle forms. We, at any rate, shall oppose it by calmly, consistently and patiently preaching proletarian solidarity and the scientific world-outlook – a preaching alien to any stirring up of secondary differences.

The revolutionary proletariat will succeed in making religion a really private affair, so far as the state is concerned. And in this political system, cleansed of medieval mildew, the proletariat will wage a broad and open struggle for the elimination of economic slavery, the true source of the religious humbugging of mankind.

¹ See Friedrich Engels, “Fluchtlings-Literatur”, Volksstaat, Nr. 73 vom 22.6.1874. 8

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Lenin’s Collected Works, Vol. 10, pp. 83-87

Karl Marx

An extract from **Contribution To The Critique Of Hegel's Philosophy Of Law**

Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being encamped outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, an *inverted world-consciousness*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, 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 justification. It is the *fantastic realisation* of the *human essence* because the human essence has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against *the world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*.

Religious distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real* happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs*

illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore *in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears*, the *halo* of which is religion.

Criticism has torn up the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man shall wear the unadorned, bleak chain but so that he will shake off the chain and pluck the living flower.¹ The criticism of religion disillusiones man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve round himself and therefore round his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve round himself.

The *task of history*, therefore, once the *world beyond the truth* has disappeared, is to establish the *truth of this world*. The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms*. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.

(1) Cf. Karl Marx, “The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law” (see this edition, Vol. 1, p. 205)

Marx-Engels Collected Works Vol 3 pp 175-176

Frederick Engels

An extract from **Bruno Bauer And Early Christianity**

One can get an idea of what Christianity looked like in its early form by reading the so-called Revelation of John. Wild, confused fanaticism, only the beginnings of dogmas, of the so-called Christian morals, only the mortification of the flesh, but on the other hand a multitude of visions and prophecies. The emergence of the dogmas and moral doctrine belongs to a later period in which the Gospels and the so-called Epistles of the Apostles were written. In this – at least as regards morality – unceremonious use was made of the philosophy of the stoics, of Seneca in particular. Bauer proved that the Epistles often copy the latter word for word¹, in fact, even the faithful noticed this, but they maintained that Seneca had copied from the New Testament, though it had not yet been written in his time. Dogma developed, on the one hand, in connection with the evangelical legend of Jesus which was then taking shape and, on the other hand, in the struggle between Jewish Christians and those of pagan origin.

Bauer also gives very valuable data on the causes which helped Christianity to triumph and attain world domination.² But here the German philosopher is prevented by his idealism from seeing clearly and formulating precisely. Phrases often replace substance at decisive points. Instead, therefore, of going into details on Bauer's views, we shall better give our own conception of this point, based on Bauer's works and also on our personal study.

The Roman conquest first directly dissolved in all subjugated countries

the previous political systems and then indirectly also the old social conditions of life. Firstly, by substituting the simple distinction between Roman citizens and non-citizens or subjects of the state for the former organisation according to social estates (slavery apart). Secondly, and mainly, by exacting tribute in the name of the Roman state.

If under the empire a limit was set as far as possible in the interest of the State to the governors' thirst for wealth, that thirst was replaced by ever more effective and oppressive taxation for the benefit of the state treasury, an exaction which was terribly destructive. Thirdly, and finally, Roman law was administered everywhere by Roman judges while the native social systems were declared invalid insofar as they did not tally with the provisions of Roman law. These three levers were bound to develop a tremendous levelling power, particularly when they were applied for a century or two to populations the most vigorous part of which had been either suppressed or taken away into slavery in the battles preceding, accompanying and often even following the conquest. Social relations in the provinces came nearer and nearer to those obtaining in the capital and in Italy.

The population became more and more sharply divided into three classes thrown together out of the most varied elements and nationalities: rich people, including not a few emancipated slaves (cf. Petronius³), big landowners or usurers or both at once, like Seneca, the uncle of Christianity; propertyless free people, who in Rome were fed and amused by the state – in the provinces they got on as best they could by themselves – and finally the great mass, the slaves. In relation to the state, i.e., the emperor, the first two classes had almost as few rights as the slaves in relation to their masters. From the time of Tiberius to that of Nero in particular, it was a practice to sentence rich Romans to death in order to confiscate their property. The support of the government was, materially, the army, which was more like an army of hired mercenaries than the old Roman peasant army, and morally, the general view that there was no way out of this situation; that not, indeed, this or that emperor, but an empire based on military domination was an inevitable necessity. Here is not the place to

examine what eminently material facts this view was based on.

General slackening and demoralisation were consonant with the general lawlessness and despair as to the possibility of better conditions. The few surviving old Romans of the patrician type and views were either removed or died out; Tacitus was the last of them. The others were glad if they were able to keep away from public life; all they existed for was to collect and enjoy riches, and to indulge in private gossip and private intrigue.

The propertyless free citizens were state pensioners in Rome, but in the provinces their condition was an unhappy one. They had to work, and to compete with slave labour into the bargain. But they were confined to the towns. Besides them, there were in the provinces peasants, free landowners (here and there probably still in communal-ownership) and, as in Gaul, bondsmen for debts to big landowners. This class was the least affected by the social upheaval; it was also the one to resist the religious upheaval longest.*

Finally, there were the slaves, deprived of rights and of their own will and the possibility to free themselves, as the defeat of Spartacus had already proved; most of them, however, were former free citizens or sons of freed citizens. It must therefore have been among them that hatred of their condition of life was still generally vigorous, though externally powerless.

We shall find that the type of ideologists at the time corresponded to this state of affairs. The philosophers were either mere money-earning schoolmasters or buffoons in the pay of wealthy revellers. Some were even slaves. What became of them if they were fortunate is shown by Mr. Seneca. This stoic and preacher of virtue and abstinence was Nero's first court intriguer, which would not have been possible without servility; he secured from Nero presents in money, estates, gardens and palaces,

* According to Fallmerayer⁴ the peasants in Maina, Peloponnesus, still offered sacrifices to Zeus in the ninth century.

and, while he preached the poor man Lazarus of the Gospel, he was in reality the rich man in the same parable. Not until Nero wanted to get at him did he request the Emperor to take back all his presents, his philosophy being enough for him. Only a very few isolated philosophers like Persius had the courage to brandish the lash of satire over their degenerated contemporaries. But as for the second type of ideologists, the jurists, they enthused at the new system because the abolition of all differences between social estates allowed them broad scope in elaborating their favourite private law, in return for which they prepared for the emperors the vilest system of state law that ever existed.

With the political and social peculiarities of the peoples, the Roman Empire also doomed to ruin their particular religions. All religions of antiquity were naturally arising tribal and later national religions which sprang from and grew together with the social and political conditions of the respective peoples.

Once these, their foundations, were destroyed and their traditional forms of society, their inherited political institutions and their national independence shattered, the religion corresponding to these naturally also collapsed. The national gods could suffer other national gods, in other nations beside them, as was the general rule in antiquity, but not above them.

The transplantation of Oriental divinities to Rome was harmful only to the Roman religion, but could not check the decay of the Oriental religions. As soon as the national gods are unable to protect the independence and sovereignty of their nation, they engineer their own destruction. This was the case everywhere (except with peasants, especially in the mountains). What vulgar philosophical enlightenment — I almost said Voltairianism — did in Rome and Greece, was done in the provinces by Roman subjugation and the replacement of men proud of their freedom by desperate subjects and self-seeking ragamuffins.

Such was the material and moral situation. The present was unbearable,

the future perhaps still more menacing. There was no way out. Only despair or refuge in the commonest sensuous pleasure, for *those* at least who could afford it, and they were a tiny minority. Otherwise, nothing but languid surrender to the inevitable.

But in all classes there were necessarily a number of people who, despairing of material salvation, sought in its stead a spiritual salvation, a consolation in their consciousness to save them from utter despair. This consolation could not be provided by the stoics, any more than by the Epicurean school, for the very reason that they are philosophies and therefore not intended for the common consciousness and, secondly, because the conduct of their disciples brought the doctrines of the schools into disrepute.

The consolation was to be a substitute not for the lost philosophy, but for the lost religion; it had to take on a religious form, just as anything which was to grip the masses then and even as late as the seventeenth century.

We hardly need to note that of those who were pining for such consolation of their consciousness, for this flight from the external world into the internal, the majority were among the *slaves*.

It was in the midst of this general economic, political, intellectual and moral decay that Christianity appeared. It was decisively at odds with all previous religions.

In all previous religions ritual had been the main thing. Only by taking part in the sacrifices and processions, and in the Orient by observing the most cumbersome diet and cleanliness regulations, could one show to what religion one belonged.

While Rome and Greece were tolerant in the latter respect, there was in the Orient an obsession with religious prohibitions that contributed no little to the final collapse. People of two different religions (Egyptians, Persians, Jews, Chaldeans) could not eat or drink together, perform any

everyday act together, or hardly speak to each other. It was largely due to this segregation of man from man that the Orient met its demise.

Christianity knows no distinctive rituals, not even the sacrifices and processions of the classical world. By thus rejecting all national religions and their common ritual and addressing itself to all peoples without distinction, it becomes the *first potential world religion*.

Judaism, too, with its new universal god, had made a start towards becoming a world religion; but the children of Israel always remained an aristocracy among the believers and the circumcised, and Christianity itself had to get rid of the notion of the superiority of the Jewish Christians (still dominant in the so-called Revelation of John) before it could really become a world religion.

Islam itself, on the other hand, by preserving its specifically Oriental ritual, limited the area of its propagation to the Orient and North Africa conquered and populated anew by Arab Bedouins; here it could become the dominant religion, but not in the West.

Secondly, Christianity struck a chord that was bound to echo in countless hearts. To all complaints about the wickedness of the times and the general material and moral misery, Christian consciousness of sin answered: It is so and it cannot be otherwise; thou art to blame, ye are all to blame for the corruption of the world, thine and your own internal corruption! And where was the man who could deny it? *Mea culpa!*

The admission of each one's share in the responsibility for the general misfortune was irrefutable and was made now the precondition for the spiritual salvation which Christianity at the same time announced. And this spiritual salvation was so instituted that it could be easily understood by members of every old religious community. The idea of atonement to placate the offended deity was current in all the old religions; how could the idea of the self-sacrifice of the mediator atoning once and for all for the sins of humanity not easily find ground there?

Christianity, therefore, clearly expressed the universal feeling that men themselves are guilty of the general decay as the consciousness of sin of each one; at the same time it provided, in the sacrificial death of its founder, a form easily understood everywhere of the universally longed-for internal salvation from the decadent world, the consolation of consciousness; it thus again proved its capacity to become a world religion and, indeed, a religion which suited the world as it then was.

So it happened that among the thousands of prophets and preachers in the desert that filled that period with their countless religious renovations the founders of Christianity alone met with success. Not only Palestine, but the entire Orient, swarmed with such founders of religions, and between them there raged what can be called a Darwinist struggle for ideological existence.

Thanks mainly to the elements mentioned above, Christianity won the day. How it gradually developed its character of a world religion by natural selection in the struggle of sects amongst themselves and against the pagan world is taught in detail by the history of the Church in the first three centuries.

(1) B. Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren...*, pp. 47-61 (“*Seneca im Neuen Testament*”).

(2) B. Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren...*; Philo, Straup und Renan.

(3) Engels is referring to Petronius’ *Satyricon* where he describes a feast in the house of an emancipated slave, Trimalchionis, who became rich

(4) J. Ph. Fallmerayer, *Geschichte der Halbinsel Morea während des Mittelalters*. Ein historischer Versuch, Part 1, Stuttgart and Tiibingen, 1830, p. 227.

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Marx Engels Collected Works Vol 24 pp430-435

Engels

An extract from **The Book Of Revelation**

One good thing, however, Ernest Renan has said:

“When you want to get a distinct idea of what the first Christian communities were, do not compare them to the parish congregations of our day; they were rather like local sections of the International Working Men’s Association.”

And this is correct. Christianity got hold of the masses, exactly as modern socialism does, under the shape of a variety of sects, and still more of conflicting individual views — some clearer, some more confused, these latter the great majority — but all opposed to the ruling system, to “the powers that be”.

Take, for instance, our Book of Revelation, of which we shall see that, instead of being the darkest and most mysterious, it is the simplest and clearest book of the whole New Testament. For the present we must ask the reader to believe what we are going to prove by-and-bye. That it was written in the year of our era 68 or January, 69, and that it is therefore not only the only book of the New Testament, the date of which is really fixed, but also the oldest book. How Christianity looked in 68 we can here see as in a mirror.

First of all, sects over and over again. In the messages to the seven churches of Asia¹ there are at least three sects mentioned, of which,

otherwise, we know nothing at all: the Nicolaitanes, the Balaamites, and the followers of a woman typified here by the name of Jezebel. Of all the three it is said that they permitted their adherents to eat of things sacrificed to idols, and that they were fond of fornication.

It is a curious fact that with every great revolutionary movement the question of “free love” comes in to the foreground. With one set of people as a revolutionary progress, as a shaking off of old traditional fetters, no longer necessary; with others as a welcome doctrine, comfortably covering all sorts of free and easy practices between man and woman. The latter, the philistine sort, appear here soon to have got the upper hand; for the “fornication” is always associated with the eating of “things sacrificed to idols”, which Jews and Christians were strictly forbidden to do, but which it might be dangerous, or at least unpleasant, at times to refuse. This shows evidently that the free lovers mentioned here were generally inclined to be everybody’s friend, and anything but stuff for martyrs.

Christianity, like every great revolutionary movement, was made by the masses. It arose in Palestine, in a manner utterly unknown to us, at a time when new sects, new religions, new prophets arose by the hundred.

It is, in fact, a mere average, formed spontaneously out of the mutual friction, of the more progressive of such sects, and afterwards formed into a doctrine by the addition of theorems of the Alexandrian Jew, Philo, and later on of strong stoic infiltrations. In fact, if we may call Philo the doctrinal father of Christianity, Seneca was her uncle. Whole passages in the New Testament seem almost literally copied from his works²; and you will find, on the other hand, passages in Persius’ satires which seem copied from the then unwritten New Testament.³

Of all these doctrinal elements there is not a trace to be found in our Book of Revelation. Here we have Christianity in the crudest form in which it has been preserved to us. There is only one dominant dogmatic point: that the faithful have been saved by the sacrifice of Christ. But how, and why is completely indefinable.

There is nothing but the old Jewish and heathen notion, that God, or the gods, must be propitiated by sacrifices, transformed into the specific Christian notion (which, indeed, made Christianity the universal religion) that the death of Christ is the great sacrifice which suffices once for all.

Of original sin, not a trace. Nothing of the trinity. Jesus is “the lamb”, but subordinate to God. In fact, in one passage (15:3) he is placed upon an equal footing with Moses. Instead of one holy ghost there are “the seven spirits of god” (3:1 and 4:5). The murdered saints (the martyrs) cry to God for revenge –

“How long, O Lord, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (6:10)

– a sentiment which has, later on, been carefully struck out from the theoretical code of morals of Christianity, but carried out practically with a vengeance as soon as the Christians got the upper hand over the heathens.

As a matter of course, Christianity presents itself as a mere sect of Judaism. Thus, in the messages to the seven churches:

“I know the blasphemy of them which say that they are Jews” (not Christians), *“and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan”* (2:9);

and again, 3:9:

“Them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, but are not.”

Thus, our author, in the 69th year of our era, had not the remotest idea that he represented a new phase of religious development, destined to become one of the greatest elements of revolution. Thus also, when the saints appear before the throne of God, there are at first 144,000 Jews, 12,000 of each of the twelve tribes, and only after them are admitted the heathens who have joined this new phase of Judaism.

Such was Christianity in the year 68, as depicted in the oldest, and the only, book of the New Testament, the authenticity of which cannot be disputed. Who the author was we do not know.

He calls himself John. He does not even pretend to be the “apostle” John, for in the foundations of the “new Jerusalem” are “the names of the twelve apostles of the lamb” (21:14). They therefore must have been dead when he wrote. That he was a Jew is clear from the Hebraisms abounding in his Greek, which exceeds in bad grammar, by far, even the other books of the New Testament. That the so-called Gospel of John, the epistles of John, and this book have at least three different authors, their language clearly proves, if the doctrines they contain, completely clashing one with another, did not prove it.

The apocalyptic visions which make up almost the whole of the Revelation, are taken in most cases literally, from the classic prophets of the Old Testament and their later imitators, beginning with the Book of Daniel (about 160 before our era, and prophesying things which had occurred centuries before) and ending with the “Book of Enoch”, an apocryphal concoction in Greek written not long before the beginning of our era. The original invention, even the grouping of the purloined visions, is extremely poor. Professor Ferdinand Benary, to whose course of lectures in Berlin University, in 1841, I am indebted for what follows, has proved, chapter and verse, whence our author borrowed every one of his pretended visions. It is therefore no use to follow our “John” through all his vagaries. We had better come at once to the point which discovers the mystery of this at all events curious book.

In complete opposition with all his orthodox commentators, who all expect his prophecies are still to come off, after more than 1,800 years, “John” never ceases to say,

“The time is at hand” – all this will happen shortly.⁴

And this is especially the case with the crisis which he predicts, and which

he evidently expects to see. This crisis is the great final fight between God and the “Antichrist”, as others have named him. The decisive chapters are 13 and 17. To leave out all unnecessary ornamentations, “John” sees a beast arising from the sea which has seven heads and ten horns (the horns do not concern us at all)

“and I saw one of his heads, as it were, wounded as to death; and his deadly wound was healed”.

This beast was to have power over the earth, against God and the lamb for forty-two months (one half of the sacred seven years), and all men were compelled during that time to have the mark of the beast or the number of his name in their right hand, or in their forehead.

“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred threescore and six.”

Irenaeus, in the second century, knew still that by the head which was wounded and healed, the Emperor Nero was meant. He had been the first great persecutor of the Christians. At his death a rumour spread, especially through Achaia and Asia, that he was not dead, but only wounded, and that he would one day reappear and spread terror throughout the world (Tacitus, Ann. VI, 22).⁵ At the same time Irenaeus knew another very old reading, which made the number of the name 616, instead of 666.⁶

In Chapter 17, the beast with the seven heads appears again, this time mounted by the well-known scarlet lady, the elegant description of whom the reader may look out in the book itself. Here an angel explains to John:

“The beast that thou sawest was, and is not.... The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth; and there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when

he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven.... And the woman which thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth."

Here, then, we have two clear statements: (1) The scarlet lady is Rome, the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth; (2) at the time the book is written the sixth Roman emperor reigns; after him another will come to reign for a short time; and then comes the return of one who "is of the seven," who was wounded but healed, and whose name is contained in that mysterious number, and whom Irenaeus still knew to be Nero.

Counting from Augustus, we have Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero the fifth. The sixth, who is, is Galba, whose ascension to the throne was the signal for an insurrection of the legions, especially in Gaul, led by Otho, Galba's successor. Thus our book must have been written under Galba, who reigned from June 9th, 68, to January 15th, 69. And it predicts the return of Nero as imminent.

But now for the final proof — the number. This also has been discovered by Ferdinand Benary, and since then it has never been disputed in the scientific world.

About 300 years before our era the Jews began to use their letters as symbols for numbers. The speculative Rabbis saw in this a new method for mystic interpretation or Kabbala. Secret words were expressed by the figure, produced by the addition of the numerical values of the letters contained in them. This new science they called *gematriah*, geometry. Now this science is applied here by our "John". We have to prove (1) that the number contains the name of a man, and that man is Nero; and

| | | | |
|-------------|---------|------------|---------|
| נ (nun) | n = 50 | ק (kof) | k = 100 |
| ר (resh) | r = 200 | ס (samech) | s = 60 |
| ו (vav) for | o = 6 | ר (resh) | r = 200 |
| נ (nun) | n = 50 | | |

(2) that the solution given holds good for the reading 666 as well as for the equally old reading 616. We take Hebrew letters and their values — Neron Kesar, the Emperor Neron, Greek Nêron Kaisar. Now, if instead of the Greek spelling, we transfer the Latin Nero Caesar into Hebrew characters, the *nun* at the end of *Neron* disappears, and with it the value of fifty. That brings us to the other old reading of 616, and thus the proof is as perfect as can be desired. (The above spelling of the name, both with and without the second nun, is the one which occurs in the Talmud, and is therefore authentic.)

The mysterious book, then, is now perfectly clear. “John” predicts the return of Nero for about the year 70, and a reign of terror under him which is to last forty-two months, or 1,260 days. After that term God arises, vanquishes Nero, the Antichrist, destroys the great city by fire, and binds the devil for a thousand years. The millennium begins, and so forth. All this now has lost all interest, except for ignorant persons who may still try to calculate the day of the last judgment. But as an authentic picture of almost primitive Christianity, drawn by one of themselves, the book is worth more than all the rest of the New Testament put together.

(1) Revelation 2:6, 14, 20.

(2) See the chapter “Seneca im Neuen Testament” in B. Bauer’s *Christus und die Caesaren*, pp. 47-61.

(3) [A. Persius Flacus,] *A. Persii Flacci satirarum liber*.

(4) Revelation 1:3

(5) The reference is inaccurate. See Tacitus, *Historiarum*, II, 8.

(6) Irenaeus, *Refutation and Overthrow of Gnosis falsely so called. (Against the Heresies)*, V, 28-30

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Marx Engels Collected works Vol 26 pp112 - 117

Engels

On The History Of Early Christianity

An extract from

CHAPTER 1

The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and freedmen, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery; Christianity places this salvation in a life beyond, after death, in heaven; socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society.

Both are persecuted and subjected to harassment, their adherents are ostracised and made the objects of exceptional laws, the ones as enemies of the human race, the others as enemies of the state, enemies of religion, the family, the social order. And in spite of all persecution, nay, even spurred on by it, they forge victoriously, irresistibly ahead. Three hundred years after its appearance Christianity was the recognised state religion in the Roman World Empire, and in barely sixty years socialism has won itself a position which makes its victory absolutely certain.

If, therefore. Prof. Anton Menger wonders in his *Right to the Full Product of Labour* why, with the enormous concentration of landownership under the Roman emperors and the boundless sufferings of the working class of the time, which was composed almost exclusively of slaves, "the fall

of the Western Roman Empire was not followed by socialism”,¹ it is because he cannot see that this “socialism” did in fact, as far as it was possible at the time, exist and even become dominant — in Christianity. Only this Christianity, as was bound to be the case in the historical conditions, did not seek to accomplish the social transformation in this world, but in the hereafter, in heaven, in eternal life after death, in the impending “millennium”.

The parallel between the two historic phenomena becomes perfectly obvious as early as the Middle Ages in the first risings of the oppressed peasants and particularly of the town plebeians. These risings, like all mass movements of the Middle Ages, were bound to wear the mask of religion and appeared as the restoration of early Christianity from spreading degeneration*; but behind the religious exaltation there were every time extremely tangible worldly interests.

** A peculiar counterpart to this was the religious risings in the Mohammedan world, particularly in Africa. Islam is a religion adapted to Orientals, especially Arabs, i.e., on the one hand to townsmen engaged in trade and industry, on the other to nomadic Bedouins. Therein lies, however, the embryo of a periodically recurring collision. The townspeople grow rich, luxurious and lax in observing the “law”. The Bedouins, poor and hence of strict morals, contemplate with envy and covetousness these riches and pleasures. Then they unite under a prophet, a Mahdi, to chastise the apostates and restore the observation of the ritual and the true faith and to appropriate in recompense the treasures of the renegades. In a hundred years they are naturally in the same position as the renegades were: a new purge of the faith is required, a new Mahdi arises and the game starts again from the beginning. That is what happened from the campaigns of conquest by the African Almoravids and Almohads in Spain to the last Mahdi of Khartoum who so successfully thwarted the English. It happened in the same way or similarly with the risings in Persia and other Mohammedan countries. All these movements are couched in religion but they have their source in economic causes; and yet, even when they are victorious,*

they allow the old economic conditions to persist untouched. So the old situation remains unchanged and the collision recurs periodically. In the popular risings of the Christian West, on the contrary, the religious disguise is only a flag and a mask for attacks on an economic order which is becoming antiquated. This is finally overthrown, a new one arises and the world progresses.

(1) A.. Menger, *Das Recht auf den vollen Arbeitsertrag in geschichtlicher Darstellung*, p. 108. For criticism of this book see F. Engels, *Lawyers' Socialism* (present edition, Vol. 26, pp. 597-616).

Marx Engels Collected Works Vol 27 pp 447-448

Engels

On The History Of Early Christianity

An extract from

CHAPTER 3

What kind of people were the first Christians recruited from?

Mainly from the “labouring and burdened”, the members of the lowest strata, as becomes a revolutionary element. And what did they consist of? In the towns of impoverished free men, all sorts of people, like the Mean Whites [¹ – *Ed.*] of the southern slave states and the European beachcombers and adventurers in colonial and Chinese seaports, then of freedmen and, above all, slaves; on the large estates in Italy, Sicily, and Africa of slaves, and in the rural districts of the provinces of small peasants who had fallen more and more into bondage through debt.

There was absolutely no common road to emancipation for all these elements. For all of them paradise lay lost behind them; for the ruined free men it was the former *polis*, the town and the state at the same time, of which their forefathers had been free citizens; for the war-captive slaves the time of freedom before their subjugation and captivity; for the small peasants the abolished gentile social system and communal landownership. All that had been smitten down by the levelling iron fist of conquering Rome.

The largest social group that antiquity had attained was the tribe and the union of kindred tribes; among the barbarians grouping was based on

alliances of families and among the town-founding Greeks and Italians on the *polis*, which consisted of one or more kindred tribes. Philip and Alexander gave the Hellenic peninsula political unity but that did not lead to the formation of a Greek nation. Nations became possible only through the downfall of Roman world domination.

This domination had put an end once and for all to the smaller groups; military might, Roman jurisdiction and the tax-collecting machinery completely dissolved the traditional inner organisation. To the loss of independence and distinctive organisation was added the forcible plunder by military and civil authorities who first took the treasures of the subjugated away from them and then lent them back at usurious rates in order to extort still more out of them. The pressure of taxation and the need for money which it caused in regions with a purely or predominant natural economy plunged the peasants into ever deeper bondage to the usurers, gave rise to great differences in fortune, making the rich richer and the poor completely destitute. Any resistance by isolated small tribes or towns to the gigantic Roman world power was without prospect. Where was the way out, salvation, for the enslaved, oppressed and impoverished, a way out common to all these diverse groups of people whose interests were mutually alien or even opposed? And yet it had to be found if a great revolutionary movement was to embrace them all.

This way out was found. But not in this world. As things were, it could only be a religious way out. Then a new world was embraced. The continued life of the soul after the death of the body had gradually become a recognised article of faith through-out the Roman world.

A kind of recompense or punishment of the deceased souls for their actions while on earth also received more and more general recognition. As far as recompense was concerned, admittedly, the prospects were not so good: antiquity was too primitively materialistic not to attribute infinitely greater value to life on earth than to life in the shades; to live on after death was considered by the Greeks rather as a misfortune.

Then came Christianity, which took seriously recompense and punishment in the world beyond and created heaven and hell, and a way out was found which would lead the labouring and burdened from this vale of woe to eternal paradise. And in fact only with the prospect of a reward in the world beyond could the stoico-philonic renunciation of the world and ascetics be exalted to the basic moral principle of a new world religion which would enthuse the oppressed masses.

But this heavenly paradise does not open itself to the faithful by the mere fact of their death. We shall see that the kingdom of God, the capital of which is the New Jerusalem, can only be conquered and opened up after arduous struggles with the powers of hell. But the early Christians believed these struggles lay in the immediate future ahead. Our John describes his book at the very beginning as the revelation of “things which must *shortly* come to pass”; and then immediately, 1:3, declares “Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy ... *for the time is at hand.*”

To the church in Philadelphia Christ sends the message:

“Behold, I come quickly.” And in the last chapter the angel says he has shown John “things which must *shortly* be done” and gives him the order:

“Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.”

And Christ himself twice says (22:12, 20): “I come *quickly.*” The sequel will show us how soon this coming was expected.

Marx Engels Collected Works vol 27 pp 460-462

[(1)“There are a few, called by the slaves ‘mean whites’; signifying whites who work with the hands ... They are usually men who have no prospect, no chance elsewhere; the lowest of the low.” Harriet Martineau, 1837, *Society in America*].

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