ABSTRACT. In this paper I examine some logical features of Marxist/Christian compatibilist projects. I use Arthur McGovern's *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* as my chief stalking horse. As an heuristic device, I distinguish the views in Marx's early writings (Marxist humanism—M-1) from the more mature theory of historical materialism (M-2), where the latter is construed primarily as a social scientific method for the explanation of historical change. I also distinguish C-1, the moral teachings of Jesus, from C-2, Christian theology. I argue that the logic of Christian compatibilism requires the acceptance of C-1, C-2, and M-2, while it must reject or downplay M-1, Marxist humanism. Similarly, the logic of a Marxist compatibilism requires the acceptance of M-1, M-2, and C-1, while it must reject C-2, Christian theology. I conclude that, while Christian and Marxist compatibilists can work together in seeking to overcome capitalism and imperialism, it is more difficult to see how the disagreements over Marxist humanism vs. Christian theology could ever be transcended.

If one asks, "Is Husserlian phenomenology really compatible with Heideggerian existentialism?", the response of many might well be, "Who knows?", and of others, "Who cares?" On the other hand, if one asks, "Are the teachings of Jesus Christ really compatible with the teachings of Karl Marx?", it turns out, quite unexpectedly, that much of Central and South America awaits the answer to this question. That the issue over the compatibility of Christianity with Marxism could even be seriously posed represents, of course, a rather dramatic historical reversal. Until recently, assuming that the latter question were seriously entertained, a standard response might have run: "Christianity and Marxism have been and remain implacably opposed. Where they do not involve mutually contradictory positions, they involve, at best, incommensurable vocabularies". Although there has been and continues to be considerable evidence in support of this view, the extent and variety of projects in Marxist/Christian syncretism and liberation theology in recent years has at least mandated a reconsideration of the traditional wisdom.

Experiments in Christian/Marxist compatibilism have challenged not only the received wisdom but also the entrenched power of Commissars and Cardinals who preside over the official institutionalized expressions of these putatively antagonistic ideologies. Such challenges have arisen "from below"—from individuals and small groups of Christians and Marx-
ists who have moved first from mutual disdain to dialogue and now, primarily in Third World countries, from dialogue to open and active collaboration. It is important to keep in mind that the original impetus for projects in Christian/Marxist syncretism did not arise from the speculations of detached metaphysicians. On the contrary, the courtship of Marxist theory by Christian theologians and activists has in the first instance been undertaken in atmospheres of brutal repression, rampant death squads, and (to most North Americans) unimaginable economic exploitation and dehumanization. But this does not mean that there is no role for the theoretical reflections of philosophers—even North American philosophers for whom the social and historical enabling conditions for reflection are vastly different from those in most parts of Latin America. As long as one keeps in mind that such reflections are provisional and stand in need of continual reassessment in the light of present and future developments (e.g., the fateful experiment currently underway in Nicaragua) such reflections may yet serve a useful purpose.

In this paper I examine some general, structural features of Christian/Marxist compatibilist projects, using as my chief stalking horse the work of an important (North American) philosopher and liberation theologian, Arthur McGovern. In general, approaches to compatibilism from the Christian side have been far more numerous and systematic than those undertaken from a Marxist stance. (I shall mention some of the reasons for this asymmetry in Section 6 of this paper.) McGovern's major work, Marxism: An American Christian Perspective, represents perhaps the most ambitious theoretical effort yet undertaken to argue for a thoroughgoing Christian/Marxist compatibilism. Most other liberation theologians, by contrast, have restricted themselves to the appropriation of selected Marxian themes, while refraining from global reinterpretations of Marxian thought.

I take it that any complete defense of a full-scale Christian/Marxist compatibilism would require the elaboration and defense of three theses, labeled below 'M', 'C', and 'M/C':

M: There exists, or can be developed, an interpretative description of Marx and Marxism which captures its essential teachings, though it may reject certain positions which have been taken to be Marxist at various periods as historically conditioned and inessential.

C: There exists, or can be developed, an interpretative description of the teachings of Jesus and of Christianity which captures its essential teachings, though it may reject certain positions which have been taken to be Christian at various periods as historically conditioned and inessential.

M/C: There exists, or can be developed, a version of M, as specified above, and a version of C, as specified above, which are such that M and C are philosophically compatible or at least not incompatible.

Stated in this way, everything will depend, obviously, on just how perspicuous are the respective interpretative descriptions one offers of both Marxism and Christianity. Although McGovern's book does not explicitly formulate the requirements of a Marxist/Christian compatibilism in this way, it is clear enough from the text that what he seeks is a
version of M, as stated above, which will be philosophically compatible with his own understanding of the requirements for an authentic Christianity. McGovern's understanding of Christianity is conditioned by a liberal, post Vatican II Roman Catholic outlook. This may account, if only partially, for the fact that McGovern does not apply to Christianity (or to an elaboration and defense of C) the same rigorous hermeneutical and deconstructive techniques which he applies to Marxism. This may make it more difficult for many to consider McGovern's case for a Christian/ Marxist compatibilism (M/C) complete, especially for those who would approach the M/C thesis from an initially Marxist stance or from an understanding of Christianity which is different from McGovern's.

In spite of these qualifications, it must be said that McGovern's approach to Marxism is scholarly and thorough. So he has much to say which is both provocative and important, not only about such obvious problems as that of atheism and materialism, but also about property rights, revolutionary violence, class struggle, democracy, and the relation of theory to practice. For my purposes it will be enough to limit myself to a critical examination of McGovern's treatment of atheism and to a lesser extent that of materialism. I shall begin in Section 2 with a brief summary of McGovern's overall position. Section 3 will take up in preliminary fashion the question of whether Marxism is best regarded as a world view or as a social scientific methodology. In Section 4 I shall examine McGovern's treatment of Marx's early "humanistic" atheism. Some parallels between McGovern's deconstruction of Marxism and the deconstruction of Christianity by the left Hegelians are explored in Sections 5 and 6. In Section 7 I propose, as an heuristic device, a schema which is designed to illuminate some general features of Marxist/Christian compatibilist projects. I test the usefulness of the schema proposed in the final section of the paper, where I examine McGovern's treatment of the relationship between what he calls Marx's "ideological" atheism and historical materialism.

SECTION 2

McGovern begins his examination of Marxism by drawing a sharp distinction between what he calls the "dominant Marxist tradition", as elaborated primarily by Engels, Lenin, Stalin and the Communist Party and a more "critical Marxism". The latter seeks to move "beyond the historically conditioned nineteenth century expression of Marxism and certainly is in opposition to the closed dogmatic form which Marxism assumed under Stalin". Some such distinction has become for western Marxists both a commonplace and a necessity, if Marxist analysis is to rise above the level of a catechism given over to the recitation of Party slogans and platforms. Nevertheless, McGovern's own form of Christian compatibilism, as I shall argue in more detail later, requires him to adopt a very ambivalent stance towards much of the central thrust of "critical Marxism".

McGovern's own approach to Marx involves the acceptance of a mitigated or pared down version of historical materialism. The latter assigns to the forces and relations of production an explanatory primacy for the purposes of historical explanation. However, McGovern construes historical materialism, not as a general metaphysical picture or worldview, but rather as a methodology, a social scientific theory for the explanation of historical transformations in the relations of production. As
such, for McGovern, historical materialism is consistent with both secular and religious worldviews, and thus does not require atheism.

Moreover, historical materialism, both for McGovern and for critical Marxists, must be sharply distinguished from "dialectical materialism". The latter, in its canonical forms enshrined by Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, does involve a worldview which is not only atheistic but materialistic in some strong, metaphysical sense. That is, dialectical materialism seeks to subsume both history and nature under an inexorable system of dialectical laws. Against such construals, McGovern argues rather that "Marx was not a metaphysician; his goal was not to replace Hegel's World Spirit with a material world substance".

Such, in the barest of outlines, is McGovern's main strategy for his interpretative description of Marxism, at least insofar as it encompasses those issues which have been thought to present the biggest obstacles for a Marxist/Christian compatibilism, viz., the topics of atheism and materialism. As such, McGovern's strategy is a most attractive one for Christian compatibilism. For, if McGovern can consistently retain some form of historical materialism which is rich enough to do what Marxists have always used it to do, viz., to explain and criticize capitalist and imperialist relations of production which result in exploitation and dehumanization, then he can plausibly argue that he has preserved at least the heart (if not the soul) of Marxism. Moreover, if he can make good his case for the demotion of historical materialism and Marxism from a worldview into a method of analysis, then he will not only have preserved the heart of Marxism, but will have done so in a form which renders it consistent with his own socially progressive understanding of Christianity.

Section 3

The plausibility of McGovern's construal of Marxism turns to a great extent on the cogency of specific arguments he advances concerning the topics of atheism and materialism. There is, however, a preliminary interpretative issue, which for some Marxists and secular liberals may look like a case of philosophical legerdemain. Can one really have one's Marx and deconstruct him too? In the opening paragraphs of the pivotal chapter which discusses Marx's atheism and materialism, McGovern poses but then tends to conflate two distinct questions which have a crucial bearing upon his central thesis. These are: (1) Are atheism and materialism "essential" and "integral" components of Marxism, or are they rather "historically conditioned factors not really essential to the achievement of Marxist socialism"?; and (2) Is Marxism best regarded as a "worldview" or as a "method of analysis" and a program for achieving socialism? McGovern tends to conflate these two questions in that he appears to hold that, if he can argue successfully for the second disjunct in question (1), he will thereby have established or at least made highly plausible the second disjunct in question (2). But this, I think, is a non sequitur, since even if one could successfully show that atheism and materialism in Marx's writings are "historically conditioned" and "in-essential", this would not automatically require a demotion of Marxism from a "worldview" into a "method of analysis".
McGovern's own lucid discussion of the tradition of "critical Marxism" in chapter two of his book helps us see why this is so. Here McGovern surveys a variety of ways in which the "humanist" and "existentialist" sides of Marx were reinstated by such writers as Lukacs, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School. Though most of these writers were not primarily concerned with religious compatibilism, they did succeed in revealing, as McGovern acknowledges, a much richer and more pluralistic Marx. One of the principal motivations for the approach of the new "critical Marxism" was to avoid narrower construals of Marxism as a crude scientism or economism by placing the economic views within the broader and more attractive context of Marxist humanism. Thus, for most critical Marxists, the narrower focus on Marxism as a social scientific methodology or "method of analysis" would lost much of its appeal were it to be unhinged from this broader Marxist humanist vision.

Critical Marxists often relied heavily for their new readings on the discovery of previously unpublished manuscripts, especially the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. A central notion in the 1844 Manuscripts is that of the alienation or self-estrangement produced by capitalism, a condition which can be overcome only though the abolition of private property. The 1844 Manuscripts revealed to a much greater extent than was previously realized, Marx's heavy debt to Hegel and the Young Hegelians, especially Feuerbach.

The rediscovery and reemphasis on the young, humanistic Marx in turn touched off a protracted scholarly debate over the continuity between the early writings and the mature theory as expressed in Capital. This debate has now been largely settled in favor of an approach which stresses the continuity between those early writings and the mature theory. Against those who championed the "two Marxes" thesis, proponents of the continuity thesis argued, for example, that the discussion of commodity fetishism in Book I of Capital is a consistent development of ideas first expounded in the 1844 Manuscripts. But the clinching arguments against the "two Marxes" thesis were derived from still another previously unpublished set of manuscripts, seven notebooks written in 1857-58, published only in 1941 by the Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin in Moscow and not widely available for western scholars until the 1950's. These notebooks, the Grundrisse or Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy, establish a great many links between Marx's early writings and his later positions. The manuscripts comprising the Grundrisse were the working notebooks for a vast project envisioned by Marx only one part of which, Capital, was ever completed. The concerns with dehumanization and self-estrangement are prominent in the Grundrisse, even though the vocabulary of alienation is much less prominent in Capital. The stress on dehumanization and alienation is in turn linked with the need to overcome capitalism in order to establish relations of production which permit fuller and more creative expressions of human potentialities.

Louis Althusser, a leading proponent of the "two Marxes" position, earned the ire of many critical Marxists by, in effect, writing off the importance of Marx's early writings as instances of juvenalia. Though McGovern does not associate himself with Althusser's dismissal, he does note that Althusser's views "have been very influential on many Christian proponents of Marxism". McGovern notes especially that "[Christian proponents of Marxism] stress particularly his emphasis on Marxism as a scientific method distinct from Marxism as an
ideology". Since McGovern himself in effect argues for a persuasive definition of Marxism construed more as a "method of analysis", one might have expected him more strongly to endorse the Althusserian reading, as have other Christian Marxists whom he mentions. The fact that he does not do so spotlight[s] a dilemma in McGovern's compatibilist project which I shall explore more fully in later sections of this paper.

I have brought up the critical Marxist reading of the young Marx in order to suggest that even if one agrees with McGovern that one can deconstruct Marx's atheism as historically conditioned and inessential, a rich philosophical framework remains in place which is not easily reducible to a mere "method of analysis", especially one which can then be readily harnessed to a Christian worldview and Christian account of human nature. McGovern appears to hold that once atheism and any form of metaphysical materialism that Marx may have been tempted by are sloughed off, Marxist humanism would then not be interestingly different or distinct from Christian humanism. But if one is not already committed to liberation theology or some other Christian compatibilist position, this equivalence is not obvious. It is hard to see, for example, how a Marxist humanism would be easily reconcilable with an Augustinian theodicy or any similar account of a fallen human nature. (Once again, I must defer for now a discussion of the relationship of Marxist humanism to Christian humanism. I shall return to this question in the final two sections.) I turn now to a more detailed examination of McGovern's treatment of Marx's atheism.

Section 4

McGovern distinguishes four versions of atheism which have been prominent in the history of Marxism. He identifies these as (a) the "humanist" atheism of the young Marx, (b) the "ideological" atheism which is associated with historical materialism, (c) the "scientific" atheism which is associated primarily with Engels' version of dialectical materialism, and (d) the "militant" atheism of Lenin.

McGovern's philosophical instincts are sound, I believe, in making short shrift of both (c) and (d). Lenin's form of "militant" atheism involves an unconscionable resort to force. Engels' form of "scientific" atheism, on the other hand, is embedded within a broader thesis of metaphysical materialism which in Engels' view is expressed as "dialectical" materialism. Today, even many western Marxists reject "dialectical materialism", at least under certain descriptions, as no longer viable. For dialectical materialism, in Engels' conception, involves a dubious philosophy of science, centered around the claim that nature itself is "dialectical", in a manner which does not depend upon the mediation of human subjects or human intentional activity. Although McGovern does not put his critique of dialectical materialism in precisely these terms, many philosophers today would reject dialectical materialism on the grounds that it involves a radical confusion of physical causation with epistemic justification as, for example, in the "copy" theory of knowledge. Moreover, dialectical materialism seems to ascribe to both nature and history an inexorable triadic movement for which no evidence is forthcoming save the authority of Hegel.

McGovern begins his discussion of (a), the humanist atheism of the young Marx, by noting that:
Marx became an atheist prior [McGovern's emphasis] to becoming a socialist. At the outset, then, his reasons for atheism were independent of his advocacy of socialism. If atheism and socialism came to be inseparably linked, they were not inseparably connected to begin with.\textsuperscript{11}

Now it is no surprise that socialism is not a necessary condition for atheism. The converse of this proposition is just as obvious, viz., that atheism is not a necessary condition for socialism \textit{simpliciter}. McGovern's interpretative problem, however, is not whether atheism is a necessary condition for socialism \textit{simpliciter} but whether atheism is a necessary condition (or an "essential" or "integral" component) for Marxist socialism. Why otherwise would the biographical facts concerning Marx's philosophical development assume such critical importance?

A classic statement of Marx's so-called "humanist" atheism occurs in the foreword to his doctoral dissertation, where it assumed a "Promethean" form of defiance: "The confession of Prometheus, 'In simple words, I hate the pack of gods', is its own confession, its own aphorism against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity".\textsuperscript{12} This form of "Promethean" atheism remains decisively conditioned by the conception of an authoritarian God "up there and out there" to which it is a reaction. As a "moment" of negation, it remains incomplete in the sense that it has not yet carved out an alternative vision of human possibilities that can stand entirely on its own. By the time of the 1844 Manuscripts, Marx was aware of this problem. He came to recognize, in other words, that in a fully developed socialist or communist culture, atheism will have disappeared along with religion. But Marx had still not yet developed a complete conception of human \textit{praxis} which could be regarded as a plausible alternative to the Christian God of the Hegelian \textit{Geist}, in the sense of being the focal concept or driving force around which history advances. This remained to be worked out in the brief \textit{Theses on Feuerbach} and more fully in the \textit{German Ideology}. Only then, with his more fully developed "materialist conception of history" (historical materialism) which assigned to the forces and relations of production a decisive historical role, would he have a conception of human \textit{praxis} which could compete with the Christian God or the Hegelian \textit{Geist} in explanatory power.

It is significant, I think, that McGovern does not advance any specific arguments against Marx's "humanist" atheism \textit{per se}. Instead, he seems to rest his case on the suggestion that Marx's humanist atheism was a quirky personal preference (a "personal atheism"\textsuperscript{13}) which is inessential for the achievement of socialism. Not the conclusion, but rather the manner in which Marx's humanist atheism is too quickly dismissed is the outcome of a dilemma in McGovern's compatibilist project which he does not squarely confront. On the one hand, McGovern has been noticeably influenced, as I have suggested already, by the "critical" Marxist revival of Marx's early philosophy in which "humanist" and "existentialist" themes played such a central role. (We have already noted that this appears to be an important factor in keeping McGovern from associating himself entirely with those liberation theologians who take the Althusserian tack of rejecting Marx's early philosophy altogether.) But nothing could be plainer than the fact that Marx's early philosophy germinated within the soil of the radical, left Hegelian cri-
tique of religion. McGovern, of course, is thoroughly aware of this. So he must resort to a corrective strategy. This corrective strategy requires him significantly to underestimate the importance of the critique of religion developed by the left Hegelians and its influence on the young Marx. It is not that McGovern ignores this influence---one could hardly do that!---but rather that he downplays its importance. This results in a serious imbalance in the manner in which Marx's early philosophy is refracted and reinterpreted through the lenses of McGovern's Christian compatibilism.

In a moment I shall offer a more explicit structural hypothesis as to why McGovern must downplay the left Hegelian side of Marx. Before doing so, I want to pause briefly to review some aspects of the left Hegelian critique of religion. This will facilitate some parallels I wish to draw later between McGovern's deconstruction of Marxism and the deconstruction of Christianity by the left Hegelians.

Section 5

There is no small irony in the fact that McGovern's Christian compatibilism requires a deconstruction of Marxian texts which parallels in certain ways the deconstructive and demythologizing techniques which the young Hegelians applied to Christianity. The left Hegelian critique of religion originated with David Friedrich Strauss's epochal *Life of Jesus* (1835). Strauss was struck by the myth-making dimensions of the Christian gospels, as the efforts of a struggling community to express its higher aspirations in the genre of a "saga". In good Hegelian fashion, Strauss distinguished six temporal stages or phases in the development of Christianity. This framework, Strauss held, could be discerned in the development of any religion.

A religious community's earliest strivings, according to Strauss, are originally expressed in an oral tradition of myth (stage one). When the myths appear in written form, they appear as naive beliefs (stage two). The ambiguity of the beliefs in the context of changing social conditions require that they be fastened to a more fixed set of symbols (stage three). The symbols then become associated with simple, naive doctrines (stage four). The doctrines then give way to more organized ecclesiastical requirements and become transformed into dogmas (stage five). Over a period of time, the increasingly untenability of the dogmas, in the light of increasing historical knowledge, makes it necessary for "the critical spirit" to demythologize the dogmas by making a critical distinction between the letter of a text and its spirit or between the "form of a ritual and its ideal content" (stage six). After applying this framework to the Christian theological dogma of the Trinity, Strauss concluded:

Is not the unity of the divine and human natures a real one in a far higher sense, when I regard the whole race of mankind as its realization, than when I single out one man as its realization? Is not an incarnation of God from eternity a truer one than incarnation limited to a particular point of time?15
In arguing for an incarnational immanence of the divine, Strauss was doing no more than giving a non-transcendental gloss to Hegel’s notion of the world-spirit or Geist. Those who followed Strauss, both in a fully historicized construal of Geist and in its application to Christianity, became known as the left Hegelians. The right Hegelians, on the other hand, fearing that Strauss may have thrown out the baby Jesus with the bath, insisted on holding on to a more trans-historical understanding of Geist. The right Hegelians, after identifying the Hegelian Geist with the Judaeo-Christian conception of God, went on to argue that the unity of God and the human race was realized in a historically unique incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ.

Marx’s teacher, Bruno Bauer, began as an orthodox Hegelian and conservative critic of Strauss. Sidney Hook has described Bauer’s development as one in which “[Bauer] developed so far to the left that he was soon saying of Strauss what Strauss was saying of the fundamentalists”.16 Bauer went much further than Strauss by arguing that the Christian Gospels, Matthew, Luke and John, were imitations of and derivative from the Gospel of Mark. Moreover, since Bauer regarded the Gospel of Mark as wholly unreliable on internal grounds, filled with numerous contradictions and incredible constructions, Bauer concluded that “Here not the saga has ruled but simply and solely the writer”.17

Though some of Bauer’s important conclusions have not withstood the test of subsequent biblical scholarship, the radical and even shocking nature of his interpretations were not without their effect on his contemporaries. One unintended consequence was to legitimate the more moderate proposals of Strauss, whose work was seen as a liberal effort to preserve at least a core of mythic truth in Christianity.

The left Hegelian critique of Christianity reached its apex in Ludwig Feuerbach’s The Essence of Christianity (1841).18 Feuerbach’s penetrating psychological analysis of the religious impulse as the projection onto a supernatural realm of human needs and self-images was to have not only an immediate impact on his contemporaries but a lasting historical influence. Engels described the reception of Feuerbach’s work as one in which “Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians”.19

The respective analyses of religion produced by Strauss, Bauer, and Feuerbach so impressed their younger contemporary, Marx, that he could write in 1844: "As far as Germany is concerned, the criticism of religion is complete, and the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism".20 The left Hegelians had produced the historical and anthropological critique of Strauss, the literary reductionism of Bauer, and the psychological analysis of Feuerbach. But so far from culminating in either a nihilism or a complacent humanism, their cumulative effect on Marx was to inspire him to uncover the social and economic conditions which give rise to religious alienation. Thus for Marx "the struggle against religion" was to become the "struggle against the world whose spiritual aroma is religion".21

Too often, not only Marx’s detractors but his followers as well have failed fully to appreciate both the intellectual and the textual contexts for his famous aphorisms on religion, including his most famous one that "[religion] is the opium of the people". All of Marx’s most famous aphorisms on religion come from the same work, the introduction to
his unfinished critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, composed in the months shortly after Marx's arrival in Paris and published in the *Deutseh-Französische Jahrbücher* in 1844. Quoted out of context, the "opium of the people" remark has come to represent a kind of arrogant dismissal of religion, which was the very opposite of Marx's intent, as the passage from which it has been lifted clearly indicates:

> Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. 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.\(^\text{22}\)

As with the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx's most famous aphorisms on religion, composed in the same year, preceded by only a few months the earliest formulations of his "materialist conception of history", first in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1945), and more fully in the *German Ideology* (1845/46), co-authored with Engels. (Both of these works also remained unpublished during Marx's lifetime. The former was first published by Engels in 1888, as an appendix to the latter's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and the latter remained unpublished until 1932.) Only with the development of historical materialism would Marx have the framework for an understanding of ideological false consciousness, of which religion was for him but one manifestation, albeit the most conspicuous.

Though McGovern is technically correct that there is no relationship of logical entailment between the "humanist" atheism of the young Marx and the development by Marx of the theory of historical materialism, there appears to have been far more intimate relationship between the two than McGovern's form of Christian compatibilism can easily countenance. If the logic of justification requires that the irreligious views of the young Marx be distinguishable and separable from historical materialism, the psychology of discovery as Marx described his own development clearly suggests that the "criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism". For Marx, only after the criticism of religion has been completed, would the way be cleared for an investigation of the social, economic, and political roots of religious alienation. "Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics".\(^\text{23}\) Moreover, that these Marxian pronouncements on the relationship between a critique of religion and a critique of society were more than merely promissory notes is amply attested to by the fact Marx did indeed proceed to develop in detail his theory of historical materialism in the months and years which immediately followed the great programmatic announcements of 1844. If the relationship between Marx's early philosophy and his historical materialism was not one of logical entailment, it appears to have been far more than merely a contingent and arbitrary temporal juxtaposition.

**Section 6**

Until recently, when exponents of Marxism and Christianity have deconstructed each other's texts, they have not done so in the interests
of compatibilism. By the time the left Hegelians had completed their deconstruction of Christianity, Marx and his followers might well have assumed that there was little or nothing left of it for Marxism to be compatible with. But today, at least in certain circles, deconstructions may be inspired by more ecumenical intentions. Certainly McGovern's hermeneutic on Marxism is not intended to refute or discredit Marxism, but rather to make it more available for Christians. Of course, such efforts at compatibilism initiated from the Christian side have been far more numerous and systematic than any undertaken by Marxists. Although many individual Marxists have moved from a stance of guarded suspicion to one of dialogue, and in some cases have moved beyond dialogue to active collaboration over specific political goals, none that I know of has undertaken a wholesale theoretical elaboration and defense of the kinds of positions that would be required for the theses labelled 'M', 'C', and 'M/C' in Section 1 of this paper. 24

A full investigation of the reasons for this paucity of efforts at a theoretical compatibilism from the Marxist side would require a separate study. Here I shall mention only a few factors before going on to sketch briefly what the broad contours of a Marxist approach to Christianity might include. First, it must be noted that although the concept of a "proletarian internationalism" has in recent years become the occasion for hotly debated sectarian disputes within the Marxist camp, it remains the case that Marxism is nothing if not internationalist. It follows that a compatibilism initiated from the Marxist side cannot afford to privilege Christian workers or the Christian religion at the expense of non-Christian workers and other religious faiths. In this respect, at least, McGovern and other Christian compatibilists have an easier task, for they are generally not interested in exploring the theoretical compatibility of Christianity with "late" capitalism and imperialism. Since this is the case, any approach to compatibilism from the Marxist side must make it clear at the outset that any hermeneutical and demythologizing techniques it applies in its interpretative redescription of Christianity must also be applied, mutatis mutandis, to Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.

Although the obstacles to religious compatibilism initiated by a critical Marxism are indeed formidable, they may not be as insurmountable as one might at first suppose. In the case of Christianity, it could be argued that much of the spadework for such projects has been performed already by Christian theologians, not so much in the interests of a Christian/Marxist compatibilism, but rather towards a religion/science compatibilism. Bultmann's well-known hermeneutic, for example, was not undertaken from scientific and reductionist motivations, but rather with the hope of uncovering an authentic core of scriptural truth which did not presuppose world-pictures which are no longer viable. 25 For a critical Marxism which does not wish to reject entirely religious forms of life and religious vocabularies as instances of false consciousness, hermeneutics such as Bultmann's may well provide an important precedent.

The continuation of the scholarly tradition of higher and lower criticism of scripture initiated in part by David Strauss and other young Hegelians may also be reappropriated by Marxists. But rather than completely debunking and rejecting religious vocabularies, which was no doubt largely justifiable given the religious institutions most visible and familiar to Marx and his contemporaries in the nineteenth century, a contemporary critical Marxism might well be better served by more ecumenical goals. For example, it has become a commonplace for
biblical scholars to make a critical distinction between the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and the developing religion and theology about Jesus of Nazareth. This distinction is already clearly discernible even within the New Testament, especially in the Johannine and Pauline Christologies which may well bear only the most tenuous of connections to the teachings of the historical Jesus. If the distinction between the teachings of Jesus and the developing religion about Jesus is already so markedly evident in the Christian canon, how much more must this be the case as the new sect struggled to carve out a unique institutional and theological identity over the next four centuries.

Disputes about where the authentic teachings of Jesus end and adventitious theological dogmas about Jesus begin have been the occasion of wars and witch-hunts throughout the history of Christianity. Accordingly, it must be recognized that the details of any hermeneutic which relies heavily on this distinction will inevitably be somewhat tendentious. Nevertheless, a critical Marxism with a professed interest in ecumenism can cautiously approach such questions in a way which need not be regarded as frivolous. It could draw on a considerable array of scholarly ammunition in exploring whether the more objectionable forms of such dogmas as Original Sin, the Trinity, the Atonement, and the unique incarnation of God in Jesus may not be "historically conditioned" and "inessential" for a more viable, ecumenical form of Christianity. The sustaining myths which have been so central to Christianity, as with those central myths in the other great world religions, could come to be regarded as non-cognitive components of a complex set of religious practices which at their best have helped to overcome narrower and more dehumanizing forms of self-centeredness.

How such a critical Marxist hermeneutic on Christianity would be carried out in detail is beyond the scope of this paper. I have mentioned only a few of the more obvious issues in order to set the stage for a structural hypothesis concerning Marxist/Christian compatibilism to be explored next.

Section 7

At the risk of oversimplification, I shall now propose a schema which seeks to highlight some more general features of compatibilist projects. Primarily as an heuristic device, I shall single out, in the broadest possible way, two stages or "moments" in Marxism, and two stages or moments in Christianity. In the case of Marxism, these are:

M-I: Marx's early philosophy, as expounded in such writing as the "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" and the 1844 Manuscripts and

M-II: Marx's mature "materialist conception of history" or historical materialism as expounded in such writings as the German Ideology, the Grundrisse, and Capital.

In the case of Christianity, the two stages or moments are:
C-I: The central, ethical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, as expounded, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount and in his compassionate ministry to the poor and the oppressed and

C-II: The developing religion and theology about Jesus, already discernible within the New Testament and greatly elaborated during the first four centuries of Christianity.

Most Christians, of course, would insist on the inseparability of C-I and C-II and so would object to any attempt to truncate Christianity in this fashion. Similarly, most Marxists, pace Althusser, would insist on the inseparability of M-I (Marxist humanism) and M-II (historical materialism). Christian compatibilism requires the acceptance of C-I, C-II, and a mitigated form of M-II, while it must reject or downplay M-I. A Marxist compatibilism, on the other hand, requires the acceptance of M-I, M-II, and a mitigated form of C-I, while it must reject C-II, Christian theology. On this account, both the Marxist and the Christian can agree on accepting some form of C-I, the moral teachings of Jesus, and M-II, historical materialism. Where they part company is over M-I, Marxist humanism, and C-II, Christian theology. (Of course, the respective versions of C-I and M-II accepted by both will also vary somewhat in their degree of articulation).

This schema is neither inevitable nor exhaustive, but merely one way of understanding some logical features of Marxist/Christian compatibilist projects. On this account, the most important differences between the two approaches come down to rival accounts of "human nature". There is no getting around the fact that Marxist humanism and Christian theology offer radically incompatible general descriptions of the human condition. In the final section of this paper, I shall test the usefulness of this scheme in my examination of McGovern's treatment of Marx's so-called "ideological" atheism. Before proceeding to this task, I must first attempt to dispose of an important objection which can be made to my claim that a critical Marxist can embrace some form of C-I, the moral teachings of Jesus.

A formidable argument against the account offered above may be posed in the form of a dilemma. If C-I is described too "thinly", containing only some basic moral teachings, then it will not adequately capture the unique contributions of Jesus to the religious life. For C-I as described above would have been common to several Jewish groups of the period, as well as to a number of other traditions, both religious and secular. On the other hand, a "thicker" version of the moral teaching of Jesus would have to include an account of a "fallen human nature". But the notion of a fallen human nature would be incompatible with both M-I and M-II.27 This is the objection. My rejoinder will be undertaken in several stages.

First, in the sayings attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, he never referred to the so-called "Fall". Judaism also, from its beginnings to the present day, has never employed the concept of a "Fall" in its construal of the relationship between Yahweh and the "Chosen People", nor, for that matter, in its construal of the relationship between Yahweh and humanity at large. Judaism has always tended to deal with the problem of humankind's "waywardness" in a fairly commonsensical fashion, recognizing that human beings are capable of both good and evil,
but never attaching any special or overriding importance to the *Genesis* II myth. Thus it seems plausible to suppose that the notion of a fallen human nature was one of those theological accretions attributable to the "second founder of Christianity", Paul, and elaborated upon in a particular virulent form by Augustine.

Of course, the teachings of Jesus were inevitably clothed in the thought-forms of his times, one of the most prominent of which was messianism. But messianism, as both the cases of orthodox Judaism and reform Judaism suggest, is thoroughly distinguishable and separable from any notion of Original Sin. But, in responding to the objection posed above, I do not wish to be impaling myself on the other horn of the dilemma by implying that there were no differences at all between Jesus and most other Pharisaic rabbis of his period. The problem is doubly delicate since, as suggested earlier, a critical Marxism cannot afford to privilege the teachings of Jesus over Rabbinic Judaism anyway. A critical Marxism should not wish to draw any invidious moral distinctions between the teachings of Jesus, at their best, and the teachings of the greatest Hebrew prophets, at their best, especially with regard to issues pertaining to conflicts between the "spirit" and the "letter" of the law. One might, nevertheless, acknowledge a uniqueness to the tone of the teachings of Jesus, with its stress on *agape*, without privieing this stress over the overriding concern of the Hebrew prophets with justice.

To deal more fully with the first horn of the dilemma posed above would involve a more detailed excursus on how a critical Marxism proposes to defuse the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of the world's great religions. I shall not undertake such an excursus here. I must rest content with my earlier hint that the most promising line of attack would seem to me to be a historically and culturally sensitive, but non-cognitivist or even pragmatic, analysis of the sustaining myths of the world's great religions.

Section 8

Marx's most frequently cited summarizing statement of historical materialism occurs in the preface to the 1859 work, *A Critique of Political Economy*. Here Marx writes:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations of production that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production that correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or--what is but a legal description of the same thing--with the property rela-
tions within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of the development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. 28

A common misreading of the foundations/superstructure distinction, encouraged by some things Marx himself says, has been to interpret it as involving an economistic reductionism. Economistic readings have taken Marx to be holding that forces and relations of production are autonomous and that they can be isolated and identified in a way which does not utilize reference to superstructural elements. That this is a mistake can be seen from the fact that relations of production are also described as property relations and so cannot be identified independently of the legal, hence superstructural, elements in which they are embedded. Scientistic and Stalinist Marxists, as well as knee-jerk opponents of Marxism, have succumbed to simplistic variants of economism, resulting in both Pyrrhic "vindications" and question-begging "refutations".

It would be foolish to claim, however, that once the cruder, economistic interpretations of historical materialism have been set aside, that it is all smooth sailing from there on in unpacking the complex, causal interactions between economic "foundations" and "superstructure". Indeed, it may turn out that the initial "base/superstructure" architectural metaphor is more misleading than it is illuminating, even if one allows that, for certain purposes, one must assign to forces and relations of production an explanatory primacy. I shall not pursue this hoary problem here. For our limited purposes, it is hoped that this abbreviated statement of historical materialism will suffice in order to enable us to turn to McGovern's treatment of Marx's so-called "ideological" atheism.

At one level, McGovern is sensitive to the inadequacies of economism and reductionistic interpretations of historical materialism. Indeed, the very coherence of Christian compatibilism would seem to require that reductionist readings of Marx be overcome, at least in the opening stages of the inquiry. Critical Marxists would probably argue, however, that economistic construals of Marx's historical materialism reappear at later stages of McGovern's inquiry, and that this is what lies behind his implicit claim that historical materialism needs to be supplemented with a Christian account of human nature.

McGovern correctly observes that the writings of Marx and Engels on historical materialism contain "two different, if interrelated, approaches to religion". According to McGovern, these are: "(1) religion is a reflection of the economic structure of society, and hence of secondary importance, and (2) religion is an ideological force which tends to justify the status quo and impede change, and hence it needs to be criticized". 29 McGovern is also correct in noting that it is the first point--religion as superstructural by-product--that receives by far the greater emphasis in Marx's writings on religion. It is this conception that pervades the "religion as opium" passage quoted earlier.

McGovern's rejoinder to Marx's critique of religion as ideology can be reconstructed as a two-stage response. In the first stage, McGovern responds to the claim that religion serves as an ideological rationalization which has as one of its principal results the reinforcement of the class interests which control the means of production. McGovern concedes that, in many cases, "Religion has served to pacify the masses
and to justify the status quo". But McGovern emphatically denies that religious false consciousness, where it "has allied itself with reactionary ruling classes" and "preaches resignation and submission to the poor", is characteristic of religion at its best. At its best, Christianity enables many to "love more freely and hopefully". In short, "whatever the failures may be in practice, many Christians today experience the message of Christ as a call to be more fully human". Authentic Christian action, for McGovern, recognizes that "The Bible itself denounces those who practice injustice while claiming to worship God". McGovern concludes the first stage of his rejoinder by noting that "ideological use or abuse of religion should not be equated with the very nature of religion".

In the second stage of his rejoinder, McGovern takes up Marx's claim that religion is a mere superstructural by-product of an alienating organization of the relations of production. It will be recalled that Marx had argued, in the 1844 Manuscripts, that the need for religion would wither away, once an authentically communist society had been achieved. Indeed, in a fully communist society, there would no longer be any need even for atheism. Since atheism is required only as the negation of religious phenomena, once the latter disappear there will be no longer any need for the former. McGovern's response to Marx's conjecture, at first blush, seems to countenance the withering away of religion as an historical possibility. He writes:

Both Christians and Marxists want a truly human society; both groups should concentrate on attaining it. If then [McGovern's emphasis], religion disappears, Marx will have been proved right. It simply did reflect human misery. If religion remains, then Christians can claim that it expresses something much deeper and more positive about human existence.

McGovern's argument here is the initially very plausible suggestion that whether or not a non-alienated community would have any need for religion is a straightforward empirical matter which can be determined only once such a society has been achieved. For brevity, I shall call this tack by McGovern the "let's wait and see" argument.

The position presupposed by the "let's wait and see" argument tends to count against my hypothesis that McGovern's form of Christian compatibilism remains irrevocably committed to both C-I and C-II. However, a subsequent passage suggests that McGovern does not really entertain the withering away of religion as a genuine historical possibility. In the penultimate paragraph of his book, part of a two-page concluding "Christian Epilogue", he writes:

Christianity has often been charged with "weakness" for its stress on interpersonal love, compassion, and forgiveness. Its recognition of the sinfulness of human nature has been derided as justification for avoiding societal change. But any truly human social order needs to embody these interpersonal virtues and to recognize its own limits and fallibility. No social order will ever produce new persons [my emphasis]. It can only remove obstacles and create a better environment in which human dignity can prosper.
Here we have the reassertion of a rather strong form of C-II, with its attendant reminder of the sinfulness of human nature. In this passage, and in particular with his claim that "No social order will ever produce new persons", McGovern self-consciously distances himself from an M-I, critical Marxist construal of "human nature".

The *locus classicus* for the critical Marxist construal of "human nature" is Thesis VI from Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*. Here Marx writes:

> Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.

For critical Marxism, a fundamental reorganization of the relations of production will, over time, transform the entire "ensemble of social relations" and hence tend to produce new human beings.

The issue over the continuing need for religion once the relations of production have been fully socialized is thus seen to be inextricably bound up with contrasting theories of human nature. This, of course, comes as no surprise. What is more problematic, however, is how McGovern’s "let’s wait and see" approach would become relevant in such a context.

In a moment I shall present two arguments which are designed to show that the "let’s wait and see" argument misrepresents the nature of the disagreement between the Marxist and the Christian over the nature and the status of religion. Before doing so, I want first to note something which is both correct and important about McGovern’s insistence that the continued viability of religion is, in part at least, an empirical matter. McGovern’s point can be reconstructed as a legitimate protest against Marxist tendencies to define religion as alienation. Many religious socialists have devoted their entire lives to the struggle against imperialism and capitalist exploitation. There is something both presumptuous and question-begging about the Marxist insistence that, even for such persons, their religious form of life is necessarily a manifestation of false consciousness and alienation. In this connection, Sidney Hook has observed that Marx’s sentence, "[religion] is the opium of the people" has itself "acted like opium upon the minds of his followers who have repeated it as if it constituted all that can be said on the subject".

Although McGovern is justified in resisting the tendency by Marxists to define religion as alienation, it does not follow from this that the need for religion or lack thereof in a socialist or communist society is a simple empirical matter. The first problem which arises with the "let’s wait and see" suggestion is that there is no automatic criterion available which would serve as the signal for when it is appropriate to apply the empirical test. That is, within the Marxist theory of post-capitalist development, at least in the very sketchy account provided by Marx himself, there is no mechanical way of determining just when a society has achieved an authentically communist stage of development. Even the removal of the capitalist class and the complete socialization of the means of production is not such an infallible criterion, according to the account Marx offers in *Critique of the Gotha Program*. For the newly de-
veloping communist society is "still stamped with the old birth marks of
the society from whose womb it emerges". The bourgeois "birth
marks", Marx claims, will be characteristic of a "first phase of communist
society", to be succeeded over time by a "higher phase". Marx describes
this higher phase as follows:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving
subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and
therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical
labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a
means of life but life's prime want; after the productive
forces have also increased with the all-round development of
the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth
flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of
bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society in­
scribe upon its banners: from each according to his abili­
ties, to each according to his needs.

It is clear from this famous instance of Marxian eschatology that Marx
never supposed that the socialization of the means of production was by
itself more than a necessary condition for the eventual achievement of
an authentically communist society. To suppose that the removal of the
capitalist class is a sufficient condition for Marxist socialism is to commit
the error of economistic reductionism mentioned earlier.

McGovern can, of course, reply that the "let's wait and see" test
need not be invoked prematurely. It would only be applicable once a
"truly human" society has been attained. But just when the society has
reached this "truly human" or higher phase is itself a token-reflexive
matter. It will not be something which is "given", nor can it be "read
off", but rather presupposes the application of normative criteria. Now it
is true that a Christian compatibilist can make a strong case that Marx's
vision of an authentically human society can be seen as a direct de­
scendant of the Judao-Christian prophetic tradition. It has become a
commonplace to observe that Marx's vision resembles nothing so much as
a secularized version of the New Jerusalem. Still it would be an exag­
geration to hold that Marxist and Christian normative criteria are identi­
cal. Thus a Marxist would be inclined to hold that the mere survival of
religious forms of life is a prima facie indication that a "truly human"
society has not been achieved, while a Christian would be inclined to
count the absence of religion as such an indication.

Even if, per impossibile, the two sides could agree on when to ap­
ply the "let's wait and see" test, it is difficult to see how they could
agree on the proper method for interpreting the results of such a test.
For, suppose that the communist society had evolved to the point where
it was appropriate to inscribe upon its banners "from each according to
his abilities, to each according to his needs". An alternative description
of the persons in this community might be that they come more and
more to exemplify those ideals enunciated by Jesus in the Sermon on the
Mount. In such circumstances, Marxists would be inclined to say that
the new communist society had produced a new kind of human being; that at
last fundamental transformations in the relations of production and in
the "ensemble of social relations" had brought into being a new kind of
human person. Christians, on the other hand, could consistently maintain
that the new non-alienating social order had at last removed external
obstacles so that humans could realize their own inherent human poten-
tial for freedom and dignity. Whereas past historical epochs had closed off such possibilities for all but a few exceptional individuals, it was now becoming possible for the human race as a whole to at last realize its historical destiny as persons made in the "image" and "likeness" of God. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we have here a conflict between opposing world views or ultimate philosophical frameworks, viz., M-I and C-II, each of which is compatible with all possible historical outcomes.²

ENDNOTES


2 McGovern is a member of the Society of Jesus and a professor of philosophy at the University of Detroit.

3 The epithet McGovern uses to describe his own method is "historical-genetical" (op. cit., 6). But since McGovern's basic interpretative posture in approaching texts corresponds to what is more commonly referred to today as "hermeneutics" and "deconstruction", I frequently use the latter terms. My use of the term "hermeneutics" and its cognates, however, is not intended to carry all of the theoretical commitments of Hans Georg Gadamer's theory of philosophical hermeneutics. Nor is my use of the term "deconstruction" and its cognates intended to carry all of the philosophical commitments of Jacques Derrida's theories of deconstruction. My use of these terms has been most influenced by the efforts of Richard Rorty and David Hoy to make these concepts viable in the context of Anglo-American philosophy. In contemporary continental philosophy, these terms are sometimes used to designate rival methods for interpreting texts. Following Rorty and Hoy, however, I tend to use these terms either interchangeably, or at least as designating complementary rather than incompatible strategies for interpreting texts. (Cf. Hoy's The Critical Circle [University of California Press, 1978].) See notes 17 and 26 for further remarks on the concepts of "hermeneutics" and "deconstruction" as interpretative strategies.

4 McGovern, op. cit., 50.

5 Ibid., 260.

6 Ibid., 245.

7 Ibid.


10 McGovern, op. cit., 80.

11 Ibid., 246.

13 McGovern, op. cit., 249.


15 Strauss, op. cit., 780.


17 Cited by Hook, op. cit., 91., Bauer's remark, directed against Strauss, that "here not the saga has ruled but simply and solely the writer" seems to parallel very closely a criticism leveled against philosophical hermeneutics by the leading continental exponent of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida. David Hoy has summarized Derrida's critique of hermeneutics as follows: "Derrida thinks that hermeneutics inevitably involves logocentrism, vestiges of metaphysics . . . Hermeneutics evolved from a general concern for the Bible, which is taken as the authoritative voice of the divine. Derrida thinks that hermeneutics may have freed itself from specifically religious contexts, but it still assumes that texts are sacrosanct, that they speak with authority and must contain some deep truth that the hermeneutic interpreter can discover" (David Hoy, "Current Controversies in Social and Literary Hermeneutics", one of two lead papers given at the University of Dayton's Colloquium on Hermeneutics, March 13, 1982). The controversy between Strauss and Bauer may parallel in further ways the contemporary controversy between Gadamer and Derrida over the relative merits of philosophical hermeneutics and deconstruction. As indicated in note 3, however, I am ignoring these differences in construing hermeneutics and deconstruction as either interchangeable or at least complementary strategies for interpreting texts. Both involve a commitment to a thoroughgoing historicism and anti-essentialism. Deconstruction, which focuses more specifically on internal textual inconsistencies, is perhaps best understood as a species of philosophical hermeneutics.

18 For an updated, comprehensive interpretation of Feuerbach, see Marx W. Wartofsky, Feuerbach (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

19 Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, included in Marx and Engels: Basic Writings, ed. Lewis Feuer (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1959), 205.

20 Karl Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", in McClellan, p. 63.

21 Ibid., 64.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.
I do not mean to imply that Marxists have totally ignored the religious left. The independent Marxist magazine, *Monthly Review*, recently devoted its entire July-August, 1984, issue to the topic "Religion and the Left". In the introductory essay, Cornel West calls for a "more nuanced understanding of religion" on the part of contemporary Marxists. Though West's essay provides a useful overview of how Marxist attitudes towards religion have evolved historically, he does not really take up in any detail the more theoretical issues posed in this paper. Nor do any of the other contributors, though they have much to say which is important and provocative. Especially noteworthy is the excerpt from Ernesto Cardinal's *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976). Cardinal, a Catholic priest who has been Minister of Culture in Nicaragua since the successful Sandinista revolution of 1979, describes how the Christian Gospels were understood by the inhabitants of Solentiname, a large island in southern Nicaragua. Cardinal had established a lay monastery in Solentiname in 1966. The peasants interpreted the message of Jesus as a call for liberation from oppression. In October, 1977, Somoza's National Guard attached the villages and monastery in Solentiname, killing many peasants and lay associates of Cardinal.

I do not mean to suggest, in my reference to the theology of Rudolph Bultmann, that something like a Bultmannian approach would be the most promising one for dialogue with, for example, the peasants of Solentiname referred to in note 24. Just as one can digest a hamburger without understanding the physiology of the digestive system, so peasants and workers can engage in authentic revolutionary action without understanding all of the complexities of either Christian theology or Marxist theory. Nor does one have to subscribe to Lenin's "vanguard" model in order to hold this position. The point I was attempting to develop in mentioning Bultmann was merely that critical Marxists need to develop a deeper appreciation for the variety and complexity of religious viewpoints.

Biblical "inerrantists" would, of course, reject this view. But the distinction between the teachings of Jesus and the developing religion and theology about Jesus is almost universally recognized by non-inerrantist biblical scholars. Scholarly debate focuses not so much on whether the distinction needs to be drawn, but rather on how great the differences are between the two. An interpretative problem can arise if one insists on making a total separation between the teachings of Jesus and the accounts of these teachings as they are recorded in the Christian scriptures. For one might thereby be placed in the untenable position of seeming to reify a "presence", i.e., the teachings of the historical Jesus, which floats free from the textual and documentary evidence for what these teachings were. Such a move would invite the Derridean critique of hermeneutics referred to in note 17 above. One can, however, stop short of reifying a non-textual, metaphysical presence, to wit, the teachings of the historical Jesus, in seeking to determine the extent to which various texts hang together. So I think one can avoid the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism. The subsequent references I make in this paper to the "teachings of Jesus" should be read with this proviso. In a similar vein, I believe that the references I make in the paper to "structural" features, or to what is essential or inessential for both Marxism and Christianity, can be cashed out in a manner which does not presuppose an essentialist metaphysics.
I owe this objection to Robert Turnbull. A related issue, concerning how adequately to distinguish, within religious experience, the ethical components from the more purely "religious" components, would require another paper. The hints provided within the body of this paper for how an interpretive redescriptions of Christianity might proceed may seem to be have dropped the religious components altogether, and thus be susceptible to the charge of an illegitimate reductionism. But the charge of reductionism in this context may itself presuppose an essentialist distinction between the ethical and the religious which is not always justified in practice.

McClellan, op. cit., 389.

McGovern, op. cit., 251.

Ibid., 255.

Ibid.

Ibid., 250.

Ibid.

Ibid., 255.

Ibid.

Ibid., 251.

Ibid., 327.

Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, in McClellan, p. 157.

Hook, op. cit., 293.

Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, in McClellan, 568.

Ibid., 569.

An earlier version of this paper was presented in a philosophy colloquium to my colleagues and students at California State University, Fullerton, in September, 1984. I wish to thank especially my colleagues David Depew, Merrill Ring, Richard Smith, and Craig Ihara for their helpful comments. A "President's Summer Research Grant" also aided in the completion of this project. Finally, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Arthur McGovern, Wendy Daniels, Maurice Ogden, Robert Turnbull and the reviewers for Philosophy Research Archives for their very constructive suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.