

Summary

Tracing the Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Czechoslovakia

The book is devoted to the mutual dialogue between Marxists and Christians that took place in Czechoslovakia and in East-Central Europe in the 1960s. Its chapters are concerned with such questions as: What was the basis for the dialogue? What historical and intellectual circumstances influenced its existence? What problems were discussed and what goals, if any, were reached? Simultaneously, some authors inquire whether the dialogue had a serious impact on the theology and philosophy of the 1960s and if the then open-minded atmosphere influenced the official religious politics of state socialist countries on the one hand and the attitude of Christian churches toward state socialism on the other. Last but not least, there remains a question concerning the legacy of the dialogue today. Are there any prospects here for a future dialogue between Christians, atheists and the political left?

The book is divided into four sections. The first section, 'Historical Context of the Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Czechoslovakia', is devoted to historical topics. It expounds the roots and circumstances of the dialogue. Key figures and key events are analysed in this section. The chapter 'Josef Lukl Hromádka and the Christian-Marxist Dialogue in an Ecumenical Seminar in Jircháře', by Karel Floss, discusses the origin and evolution of the ecumenical seminar in J. A. Comenius Theological Faculty in Jircháře, Prague. Simultaneously, it is devoted to the initiator and leading patron of which was the world-renowned representative of dialectical theology J. L. Hromádka. An outline is given not only of his basic theological profile but also of his efforts to find a linkage between Christian belief and the main factors in the struggle for a more just world – including the revolutionary steps of socialism, and even communism. The role of J. L. Hromádka is emphasized along with that of two younger protagonists – the Protestant Ladislav Hejdánek and the Catholic Jiří Němec.

The chapter 'Historical Perspectives of Marxist-Christian Dialogue and the Conference in Mariánské Lázně in 1967', by Jan Mervart, is devoted to the congress held on the Marxist-Christian dialogue in Mariánské Lázně, organised by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and German dialogue society Paulus-Gesellschaft in the spring of 1967. It was the first and only symposium to be held in a socialist country. The Mariánské Lázně conference is conceptualized in two respects: as part of the international Marxist-Christian dialogue on the one hand and as part of official state socialist church policy on the other. The author's statement is based on the presumption that both perspectives are important for an understanding that depicts the specific features of the intellectual atmosphere of the 1960s.

The chapter 'The Role of Erika Kadlecová and of the Sociology of Religion in the Marxist-Christian Dialogue of the 1960s', by Zdeněk R. Nešpor, deals with the impact of the leading Czech sociologist of religion Erika Kadlecová (born 1924) and of the discipline itself on the Marxist-Christian dialogue of the 1960s. Kadlecová commenced her career as a rigorous Marxist scholar in the late 1940s and 1950s; however, she relatively quickly relaxed her principles and turned her attention to religion and the study thereof. She remained a Marxist, confident of the eventual extinction of religion; nevertheless, she rejected direct anticlericalism in favour of encouraging dialogue with Christian clergy and scholars. Both in her scholarly work in the sociology of religion and in her public role as head of the church department at the Ministry of Culture during the Prague Spring, Kadlecová opened the doors to a deeper mutual understanding between religion and the state, and in fact influenced Communist party/state religious policy in favour of improving conditions with respect to certain real church needs. As the main organiser of the first and only Marxist-Christian conference attended by representatives from both East and West, held in Mariánské Lázně in 1967, she became known and respected by the international scientific community; however, the conference, together with what were seen as other 'pro-religious' activities, eventually led to her downfall after the end of the Prague Spring and the fall of reform communism. Kadlecová left both the Ministry and academia and the 'suspicious' discipline of sociology

of religion became a strictly controlled part of the field of ‘scientific atheism’, fully subordinated to neo-Stalinist doctrine, where it was to remain for the next twenty years.

The chapter ‘Jan Hus: Between Ideology and Science in the Era of Marxism-Leninism. Paths of Milan Machovec and Robert Kalivoda from Hussitology to Marxist-Christian Dialogue’, by Martin Dekarli, reconstructs intellectual journey of two former prominent figures of Czechoslovak Marxism, Milan Machovec and Robert Kalivoda, and their contribution to the Marxist-Christian dialogue. It further traces two different approaches and interpretations of Jan Hus, developed between 1953 and 1968, on the narrow margins between ideology and science. The text draws attention to the two diverse attitudes and struggles within the dominant master narrative of Marxism-Leninism, ideologically baptised by Zdeněk Nejedlý. Likewise it examines divergent interpretations and religious aspects, and the relationship between philosophy and theology in the canonical *oeuvre* of Jan Hus. Milan Machovec started his journey in the very centre of ideological Marxism-Leninism. He attempted to revitalize Palacký’s national revival narrative, read by and through the novels of Alois Jirásek, and gradually departed in the direction of the Marxist-Christian dialogue. By contrast, Robert Kalivoda developed an original Marxist philosophy of history for reading Hus’s writings, deliberately against the dominant narrative of Marxism-Leninism. However, he joined the Marxist-Christian dialogue only briefly. His approach was deeply inspired by the early works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (and other theoreticians such as Kurt Konrad, Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber). In the conclusion both interpretations are contextualised within the framework of the contemporary discussions.

The chapter “‘Skalický is a PhiloMarxist’. The Christian-Marxist Dialogue in the Roman Journal Studie’, by Jaroslav Vokoun, is concerned with a continuation of the dialogue between Christians and Marxists that was begun in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. It follows the development and problems of this dialogue in the situation of exile as it was mirrored in the Catholic revue *Studie*, aimed at those living in exile. (*Studie* also published papers from exile conferences and by Czech dissident writers.) The chapter is especially focused

on texts written by Karel Skalický, Karel Vrána and Zdeněk Mlynář. These contributors both set the topics of the continuing dialogue and shaped the approach to them. Those topics included Marxism as an invitation to theological reflection, modern atheism and its problems, and creating a system of values for a new era, not a simple return to the past. They also consciously laid the foundations for a culture of dialogue between people with contradicting opinions, which was also necessary later in the post-communist era. The author is convinced that many of the ideas and arguments put forward in the journal *Studie* have not yet been fully realised and remain a challenge to theology and civic society.

The second section, 'Theism, Atheism and the Secular Era', deals with chosen themes of the dialogue, such as transcendence, new approaches to theism and atheism, human universalism and God's existence. The chapter 'The Idea of Transcendence as a Medium for the Revision of Marxism', by Jan Černý, examines the idea of transcendence as one of the disputed topics in the dialogue between Czech Marxist philosophers and Christian theologians. Although Marxists had rejected the idea of a transcendent God, they found within their own philosophical tradition the idea of a historical transcendence, i.e. the idea of a person's practical self-transcendence in society. The refusal to found – and to follow in this the biblical tradition – historical transcendence upon the ontological transcendence of God has prompted Marxist thinkers to develop a more carefully thought-out idea of historical transcendence, founded on the free activity of the human person. Within the project of what has been called the 'humanisation of Marxism', they attempted to avoid the reduction of the human individual to a mere historical-sociological category; they made efforts to escape the danger of a sacralisation of history by referring to the personal, individual moment of a given human existence. This chapter presents a set typology: based on texts by Czech Marxists dating from the period of the Marxist-Christian dialogue, it formulates three typical positions regarding the idea of historical transcendence, which were designed as three different ways of thinking about the future definitive liberation of humanity within communist society as the present action of an individual.

The chapter 'Theism within the Framework of Egon Bondy's Non-Substantial Ontology', by Petr Kužel, presents the endeavour of the Czech philosopher Egon Bondy to theoretically constitute a certain type of theism within the framework of non-substantial ontology. The first part of the chapter describes presents the main principles of non-substantial ontology as a non-reductionist approach to reality. It deals with some issues linked to the problem of ontological substance, causality, determinism and teleology. The second part analyses how this type of ontological model (which was originally formulated as strictly atheistic) could be modified and described from a theistic point of view, or more precisely: how it is possible to formulate a theistic model within the framework of non-substantial ontology. The result is an apersonalistic form of theism, in which there is no place for any transcendent instance on the one hand, nor for pantheism on the other.

The chapter 'Vítězslav Gardavský and the Marxist Assumptions of Universalism', by Vít Bartoš, introduces Gardavský's concept and critique of the principle of 'human universality', within the context of the Marxist-Christian dialogue. The inquiry is mainly concerned with Gardavský's distinction between the Catholic and Marxian anthropological concepts of human universality. However, both concepts share a common assumption that the Enlightenment-rationalist understanding of the human essence is inadequate and that in it understanding is implicitly given as a part of capitalist ideological structure. Gardavský concludes that there is an internal connection between Marxist and Catholic anthropology, and that there is a unifying intellectual-emotional base which enables fruitful dialogue, namely love as a specific kind of human existential act. From Gardavský's point of view, love expresses the integrity and completeness of unalienated humanity.

The chapter 'Death-of-God-Theology and Marxist Atheism', by Ivan Landa, focuses on affinities between Christianity and Marxist atheism within the context of the Marxist-Christian dialogue taking place in the former Czechoslovakia during the 1960s. The central assumption shared by Christian participants in the dialogue consisted of a claim that atheism is not constitutive for Marxism. It is exactly

this assumption which is placed under scrutiny and subjected to critique. Accordingly, the main thesis of the chapter runs as follows: Atheism is constitutive not only for Marxism, but also for Christianity as such. This thesis is substantiated in several steps. In the first step, the project of non-religious interpretation, initiated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is examined in detail. It transpires that according to Bonhoeffer *methodological* atheism is an integral part of Christianity. In the second step, 'Death of God' theology, and the position advocated by Thomas J. Altizer, in particular is investigated, assuming that *ontological* atheism is characteristic of Christianity. In the third and last step, Vítězslav Gardavský's account of Marxist atheism is discussed. It is argued that Gardavský's position provides sufficient evidence for a claim that atheism is constitutive for Marxism, since it makes up its metaphysics.

The chapter 'Speaking about God in a Secular Society according to Wolfhart Pannenberg', by Petr Gallus, critically examines the central thesis of the theological prolegomena put forth by German protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, as presented in his early work *Revelation as History* and in the first three chapters of his magnum opus *Systematic Theology*. According to Pannenberg, theology is based on speech about the Christian God and his revelation in the course of history. Pannenberg attempts to reconstruct different ways of speaking about God throughout history and hence presents a form of critical philosophy of religion. He starts out from the idea of God and arrives at concrete manifestations of God in human life that he calls 'religion'. Religiousness in his view is an integral part of human nature, since human beings have some, even if non-thematic, consciousness of God. However, there is no direct path leading from consciousness to God. The only way to acquire knowledge of God is through God's self-revelation throughout the entire history of mankind. The eschatological anticipation of such a total revelation in history is God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It is here that the speech about God reaches its peak. At this point the phenomenological prolegomena open up a space for a methodological turn towards a systematic theology that aims at an explanation of the Christian faith from a Christian point of view.

The third section, 'Perspectives and Limits of the Marxist-Christian Dialogue', questions whether the dialogue was of a particular and/or of a universal character. The chapter 'Marxism and Christianity today', by Jiří Pechar, is concerned with changed role of Marxism and ideology. The author argues that previous debates between Christians and Marxists attempted to find some common ground and point of contact. However, the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe changed attitudes towards Marx's thought considerably. The important changes affected not only Marxism, but also Christianity. Even in Catholicism it was possible to observe a certain tendency and sympathy towards the program of demythologisation as advocated by the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann. A good example is provided by the latest book written by the theologian Mireia Ryšková, who teaches Biblical studies at the Charles University Catholic Theological Faculty. She assumes that reports about Jesus's resurrection should be viewed as literary forms, used by the Evangelists to convey their certainty that Jesus is alive. In this way, they transformed the idea of the life after death into something that manifests itself and is sensibly accessible for perception.

The chapter 'The traumatic Core of the Marxist-Christian Dialogue', by Michael Hauser, addresses two possible interpretations of the Marxist-Christian dialogue. The first maintains that the dialogue was only a historically specific phenomenon, whereas the second considers it to be based on the similarity between Marxism and Christianity, which is demonstrated by the concept of man, universalism, and the dimension of the future. The second interpretation is put forward by way of the idea elaborated by the Czech philosopher Milan Machovec. In his view there is a complementary relationship between Marxism and Christianity. Marxism supplements what is lacking in Christianity and vice versa.

The chapter 'Dialogue between Christians and the Political Left Today: An Attempt to Conduct a Field Investigation', by Filip Outrata, is devoted to dialogue between Christianity and the political Left. The author argues that such a dialog is not just a chapter in history, but also relevant today. The aim of the chapter is to locate some of the prerequisites of, and to outline the real form of this dialogue in

today's Czech society. It stresses the importance of the new activist movements and new media as arenas for this dialogue; it focuses on the possibilities as well as weaknesses of the dialogue within political parties and churches. The most substantial and ever topical prerequisite of the dialogue between Christianity and the political Left is Christian social teaching, combining specific social praxis and its theoretical reflection. The documents of the last two popes of the Roman Catholic Church, Benedict XVI and Francis, are taken as an example of this reflection. Against this background, dialogue between Christianity with its social teaching and the democratic political Left with its authentic emancipatory ethos appears as an inevitable task.

The last section of the book is composed of documents, memoirs, diaries and works of the parties involved in the dialogue, namely Egon Bondy, Jiří Němec, Ladislav Hejdránek, Vítězslav Gardavský and Jan Sokol.