

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

17. Marxism and Communism

Lesson Objectives

To understand the key elements Marxism and Communism, and how to reach followers with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Atheistic communism is a political and economic system that has become one of the most powerful forces in the world. It shaped history from the early 1900s to the 1990s. Hundreds of millions are under its sway, including in China. Christians need to understand how to approach communists with the Gospel, the power of God that is able to transform individuals and societies in a way communism cannot.

What is Communism?

The word communism comes from the Latin *communis*, which means "common" or "belonging to all". Today it has several meanings; it can be:

- a form of government;
- an economic system;
- a revolutionary movement;
- a way of life;
- a goal or ideal;
- a set of ideas about how and why history moves, and in what direction it is headed



Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin

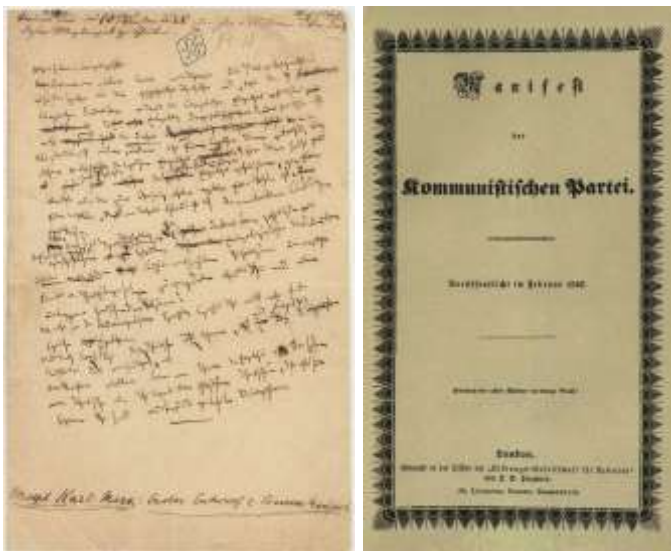
Developed by Lenin (1870-1924) and others, based on writings by Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx was a German social philosopher in the 1800s; Lenin was a Russian revolutionary leader of the early 1900s. Philosophers and reformers long supported ideals such as community ownership and equality of work and profit. Marx transformed these into a revolutionary movement.

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

Marx's ideas were first expressed in the Communist Manifesto (1848), a pamphlet he wrote with Friedrich Engels, a German economist. Marx believed the only way to ensure the creation of a happy, harmonious society was to put the workers in control. Marx assumed the ruling class would never willingly give up power, so struggle and violence were inevitable if society was to change.

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

Communist Manifesto



The *Communist Manifesto* was first published in 1848

The terms “communism” and “socialism” are frequently confused. Communists usually refer to their beliefs and goals as “socialist.” But socialists do not necessarily consider themselves Communists. Communists and socialists both seek public ownership or regulation of the principal means of production, distribution and exchange. (“Man must eat to live; change will come about of economic necessity; society needs to be ordered around the means of production, etc.”) But most socialists favour peaceful and legal methods to achieve their goals, while Communists often use force. Socialism may or may not be based on the teachings of Marx. Communism is based on the teachings of both Marx and Lenin.

Why Study Communism?

Communism is about more than economics and politics; it is a world view with religious characteristics:

- sacred texts – Capital; Communist Manifesto - have a religious flavour about them; Marx sounds like an Old Testament prophet;
- teaches the idea of repentance, at a local level –demands a confession of faith by new converts, with admission of their past activities, errors and failures;
- demands complete surrender, obedience and loyalty (Mexican article);

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

- aims to win new converts, reach the world and install a new order/society;
- based on faith in a material world view and the fulfilment of the hope of a world revolution, world society worth dying for;
- eschatological – the future Utopia will have no unemployment; no insecurity; no exploitation of man by man, no famine, pestilence, racial bitterness, hatred, wars; nothing but plenty and peace (Marxist Heaven);
- soteriological – promises to redeem men and women from the weakness and failure of the present system, leading to a better world, with a new race of men and women;
- hierarchical system of leadership, like bishops, priests, laity;
- dependence on the Creator – the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat".

Marx was a philosopher, not a revolutionary. He did not transform his society, but his ideas have influenced hundreds of millions around the world, who consider him their spiritual father.

Communism in the 20th Century – Brief Overview

Instability after World War II saw Communist gains in many countries. In 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany signed a non-aggression pact promising not to attack each other. In 1939 and 1940, the Soviet Union took over Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and parts of Poland, Finland, and Romania. All of this territory became part of the Soviet Union.

Toward the end of the war, the Soviet Union helped free many countries from German and Japanese control. Soviet troops enabled the establishment of Communist-controlled governments in several of these countries, including Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and North Korea. Other countries, such as Czechoslovakia, followed later.

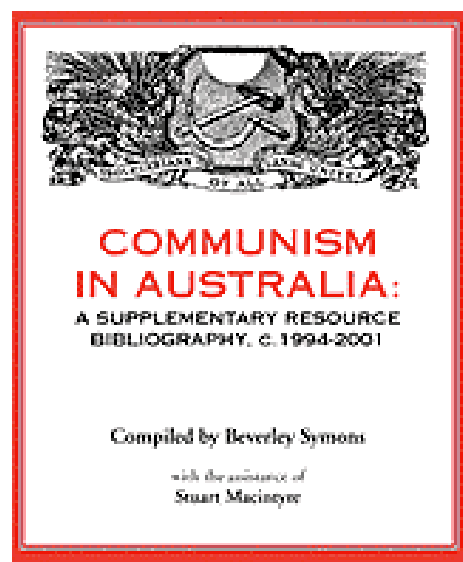
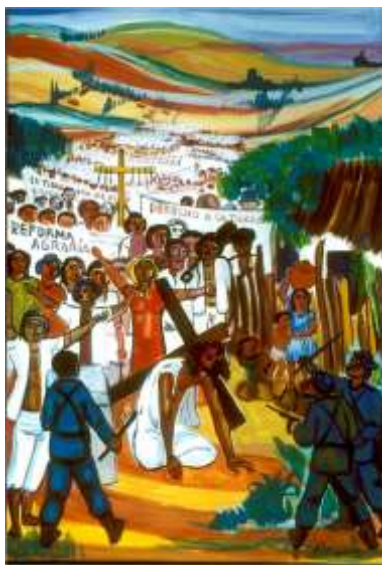
After World War II, civil war broke out in China between the Communists and the Nationalists. By 1949, the Communists, led by Mao Zedong, had taken over mainland China.

Communism poses as a movement of the people and by the people, but it is essentially a political power movement.



Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

In Latin America (eg Nicaragua), Marxism was adopted by elements in the dominant Roman Catholic church, and found expression in so-called "Liberation Theology". All too often, Marxists were the only ones working to relieve inequality and suffering in what were still feudal Latin American societies. Liberation Theologians claim their continent has been victimized by colonialism, imperialism (especially US-based) and multi-national corporations, and that the Biblical models in the Old Testament and Jesus' concern for the poor and outcast (solidarity with the oppressed against the oppressor), combined with Marxist ideas of ongoing class struggle, justifies a secular struggle for liberation. Their model has been adopted by other liberation movements in the so-called "Third World". The main Marxist stronghold in Latin America is Cuba.



Liberation Theology blends the Bible and Marxism
The Communist Party of Australia was active until the early 1990s

Communism has varied from one country to another. However, some basic features are shared by most Communist societies:

- totalitarianism (government controls most aspects of people's lives);
- single party states (ruling parties dominate all political posts and government bodies, no real opposition is permitted);
- centrally planned economies, also called "command economies", in which the state owns the means of production and the central government plans (and manipulates) economic activity;
- cooperation and collective (group) needs are valued over and above personal freedoms. The well-being of the state and society considered more important than that of the individual;
- individuals not allowed to publicly criticize Communist Party leaders, policies or the Communist system. Writers critical of Communism not allowed to publish their works. (Restrictions exist in spite of constitutions claiming to guarantee freedoms of speech, press, and assembly);
- religious worship discouraged because considered a threat. Church members are restricted in their jobs and usually not allowed to join the Communist Party.

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



Marx believed that in a Communist society, the powers of the state - and eventually the state itself - would gradually disappear. But no Communist country ever eliminated the state. In practice, communists believed they had to be defended from capitalist influences from other countries. Therefore, secret police as well as regular police forces and a strong military establishment would be needed until Communism had been attained worldwide. Personal rights would always be subsumed by the greater needs of society.

By the late 1980s, most Communist countries had experienced long periods of little or no economic growth. Centralized planning proved to be inefficient and hindered the development of new technologies. As a result, Communist countries could not compete economically with non-Communist industrial powers. Many subsequently abandoned communism. Of those that have not, some are economic "basket cases" (eg North Korea. Cuba). In China only an opening up of the economy has ensured growth.

Marxism versus Christianity

Discipline	Marxism	Biblical Christianity
Theology	<p>Atheism.</p> <p>Marx was an atheist before he became a communist. Engels and Lenin agreed that religion was a "drug" or 'spiritual booze:' and must be combated. To them, practicing atheism would mean a "forcible overthrow of all existing conditions", including the economy, government, law, etc. Communist Parties have generally not deviated from their founding fathers' attitudes towards God or religion, which explains the persecution of the church in communist-dominated countries.</p>	<p>Trinitarian Theism</p>
Philosophy	<p>Dialectical Materialism.</p> <p>Materialism says that "all that exists and is important is matter" (the Bible says the things that are visible are only temporary). The dialectic says that in everything there is a "thesis" (the way things are") and an "antithesis" (opposition to the way things are), which inevitably clash. The result of the struggle is a "synthesis", which becomes a new thesis, attracting another antithesis, synthesis, etc. For Marxists, Dialectical Materialism is the driving process that moved matter from inorganic state into life, then to animals, humans, and finally organised social institutions such as governments and nations.</p>	<p>Supernaturalism</p>

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



<p>Ethics</p>	<p>Proletariat Morality.</p> <p>Marxist ethics do not come from absolutes. Whatever advances the "proletariat" (working class) is "good". Whatever hinders its advance in social and human evolution is evil. The killing fields of Cambodia, the Soviet Union, Ukraine ,mass murders in China, etc. were the practical results of "class morality". "It does not matter is three quarters of the world is killed, as long as the remaining quarter is communist" (Lenin).</p>	<p>Absolutism</p>
<p>Biology</p>	<p>Darwinian Evolution.</p> <p>Marxism depends on theories of evolution and spontaneous generation. Marx made it clear Darwin's <i>Origin of the Species</i> was the basis for his views on class struggle. However, Dialectical Materialism needs a theory with clashes and leaps, not a gradual progress like natural selection. Marxists believe in "punctuated equilibrium", ie each species remained stable for long periods of time (equilibrium) and evolution happened through ruptures (punctuations) that led to leaps from one species to the next.</p>	<p>Creation</p>
<p>Psychology</p>	<p>Monistic Pavlovian Behaviourism.</p> <p>Marxism teaches everything a person does is the result of their make-up and the influence of environment (education, surroundings, background, family, etc) on their nervous system. The brain is a collection of nerves, blood vessels and tissues that have been programmed to react in certain ways. Like Pavlov and his dogs, humans are conditioned to feel patriotic when they see a flag, etc. The job of communism is to change conditions and the way people see life.</p>	<p>Mind/Body Dichotomy</p>
<p>Sociology</p>	<p>Abolition of Home, State and Church.</p> <p>The Marxist is anxious to usher in a communist society because only then will man achieve a truly moral social consciousness. When mankind has achieved this, society will be so radically changed that the individual will be influenced to act responsibly at all times. Since every man can be trusted to act responsibly (under the right leadership), established institutions such as the church or family will be unnecessary. In fact. these only serve to hinder man's development, or lead him astray.</p>	<p>Home, Church and State</p>

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



Law	Law was devised by the propertied class (the bourgeoisie) to protect personal or state property. In Marxism sovereignty is given to proletariat. Communist law grants some rights but only to assist the advancement of communism. Law (and state) will become unnecessary when the full communist system is victorious and the proletariat will experience its communistic paradise.	Biblical/ Natural Law
Politics	Eventually the world proletariat will rise up, throw off the chains of bourgeois oppression and seize the means of production, distribution and exchange (and with them political power), and establish a global 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This is the next major step in the evolution of a coming world order. Marxists call for a one-world dictatorship of the proletariat because they will control such a government through Marxist/Leninist law. Marxists believe that once every trace of bourgeois ideology and capitalistic tradition has been eradicated a fully communistic society will exist. In such a society, government will become unnecessary and will wither away.	Justice, Freedom. Order
Economics	Economics is central to Marxism. The economic system of society determines the nature of legal, social, political institutions. Marxists believe anything wrong with society is the result of imperfect modes of production. History has revealed an ordered progress. Societies have been improving because the economic systems on which they have been founded are gradually improving:- primitive society (things held in common) > slavery > feudalism > capitalism. Flawed capitalism will eventually give way to communism. Private property will be abolished; man will no longer oppress his fellow-man in an effort to protect his property. When all private property and class distinctions have withered away, the transition from socialism to communism (the highest economic form) will be complete and each individual will see their needs fulfilled.	Stewardship
History	History for the Marxist is the result of the dialectics at work through biological evolution, economic and the social order. History is a progression of biological and economic evolution that will ultimately result in a society of communist people in a communist paradise.	Historical Resurrection

The above is a simple description. Marxism is continually being revised.

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



Is Christianity Communist?

A misconception exists that Christianity was an early form of communism. Based on a relationships in the New Testament church (Acts 2-4), located in Jerusalem (the model does not appear to have been adopted by the Gentile churches).

This is a misunderstanding of the nature of Christianity. It is impossible to accept dialectical materialism and Christianity at the same time. Marxism certainly sounds like caring and sharing taught by the Bible ("From each according to his ability top each according to his need").

However, Marxism:

- is a fanatical philosophy that has declared war on the Christian God;
- is anti-religion (uncompromisingly rejects all religious faiths, not just Christianity);
- has all the hallmarks of antichrist;
- denies supernatural realities;
- places its faith in economic forces, not in God;
- works to produce a transformed society by man's effort, not the power of Jesus Christ in peoples' hearts;
- bases all of its ideas, structures and customs on a social structure;
- denies the inalienable rights God has given to all men and women;
- teaches there is no objective religion, no objective God/Jesus Christ; only subjective beliefs that are produced by our own desires and needs;
- denies the individual (cf Jesus' parables in Luke 15);
- elevates man, in lieu of God (a form of idolatry, cf Romans 1);
- denies absolute truth (we are "tools of our environment").

The existence of the church is an obstacle to the achievement of a communist world.

Marxism regards economics as the locus of the problem; the "stifling" family unit, the "delusion" of religion and flawed capitalist systems are "evils" that have to be abolished.

The key is class struggle > revolution > classless society and the abolition of private property.

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Christian View of Marxism

Christians believe that:



life has meaning beyond the material realm
Christ was concerned with this world, not just the next
we do not attempt to escape the secular (cf Monasteries, hermits, orders);
nevertheless we are exhorted by Christ to lay up treasures in heaven;
Christians distinguish between secular and eternal; we are "in the world, but not of it". Marxism fails at this point.

Sharing the Gospel with Marxists

Marxism is an ideology, but most of its adherents are "ordinary" men and women who are searching answers the "system" does not provide. Many do not even understand what Communism is about, so Christians need to present a combination of a Christian view of the world, a Biblical epistemology and eschatology, and the character of Jesus Christ in action:

The Nature of Society

- articulate a Christian view of history- it is not just about economics. Understand the Bible and history: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Marxism appeals to facts of history. As I Peter 3:15 exhorts us, we must be able to give a reason for our hope;
- the Biblical response is not a Western response (materialism is as evil as communism);
- don't be hijacked by materialism, nationalism, politics or liberalism (cf John 18:36).

The Nature of Man - The Solution is Spiritual Not Ideological

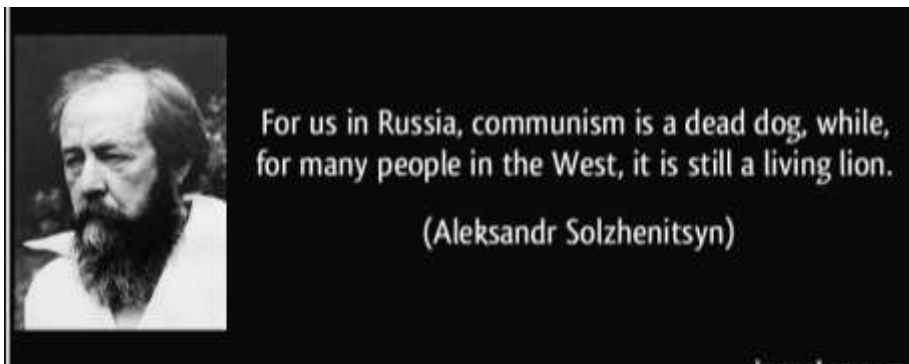
- remember: social problems are, fundamentally, human problems that need a spiritual response;

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- before a new social order is possible, people need a new birth; social reform cannot change hearts- only regeneration; even then, the world will continue to rebel against God;
- don't be simplistic, or fall back on unreasoning contempt (Marxist theories have captured the hearts and devotion of many millions of followers); meet the communist where they are with the Truth of God's revelation in Christ

Affirmative Christian Action

- demonstrate that reaching and redeeming people from exploitation and oppression are part of the Christian message and the effects of "salt" and "light"; acknowledge the suffering and injustice rampant in the world and (like Isaiah, Amos, James, Micah, John the Baptist, Jesus and others) speak out about issues facing men and women today, eg _ racism, injustice, denial of human rights _ inequality, greed, poverty, economic marginalisation _ hunger _ disease _ the arms race, the nuclear threat _ exploitation of workers, unfair industrial relations, child labour _ environmental degradation.



The Christian Example

- live out of the strength of a personal relationship with (and surrender to) Jesus Christ;
- live as though the Kingdom of God is a reality NOW, not just a future Utopian hope or theory;
- give unselfish, unconditional I Corinthians 13 love, like the Good Samaritan;
- BE the church, proclaiming in doctrine and life the fullness of the Gospel, not the empty shell Marx saw in England prior to the formulation of his doctrines;
- never forget that communists are human beings loved by God;
- remember you are engaged in a spiritual conflict;
- bear the one burdens of others this is the law of Christ (Galatians 6.2);
- set an example of hard work, incentive; use of God-given talents; for the good of all.