

a convergence and divergence

the positivistic perspectives. Such a concentration makes them closely-related partners of an authentic dialogue and social cooperation.

There is, as already indicated, a serious difference between Marxism and the Christian message. If I were to define more closely the decisive difference, I would cite the question of God.

I recognize that precisely this difference can be viewed as an out-moded and consequently superseded recognition. The question can be put, "Is this question (about God) really a genuine boundary between Marxism and the Christian message? Hasn't theology today become quite cautious and hesitant exactly in this respect? Does the concept of God really belong to the "essence of Christian faith?" Many theologians today ask these questions.

From the other side, paradoxically, this question seems to be less fixed than ever. The saying that "God is not entirely dead" is heard from Marxist quarters.

From conversations with them we learn again that the concern for transcendence is taken much more seriously by many present day Marxists. Sometimes it is even emphatically asserted that the Marxists themselves in conversation with the Christians must promote this concern (for transcendence) with a renewed radicality.

Does the fundamental difference really rest on this point?

Concept of God a problem

If I answer this question affirmatively, then I must hasten to add that in the "question of God" I do not refer to a metaphysical concept of God that we must establish as an absolute boundary over against the historical dynamic and social orientation of Marxist thought. Such a metaphysical concept would be a completely false boundary. The God of whom I am speaking is not the "God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Consequently, God is not the God of a metaphysical scheme, but the God of history, of society, of the future—all in the concrete sense of the Gospel of God's way to mankind in Jesus Christ.

That is transcendence that does not alienate man, one that does not divest man of his historical and social dimension, one that does free him for history, for social life, for the future. Furthermore, this transcendence is what sets the situation of man in a new light—in the light of grace.

That is what I mean by the question of God: the transcendence of grace. Marxism disavows the question about God. It sees in it the improper turning away from man's concrete and worldly obligations.

In view of the misuse of religion in the course of history, Marxism has solid grounds for its atheism. Dedication to the great task of the revolutionary refashioning of this world must not be watered down with "pious reasons."

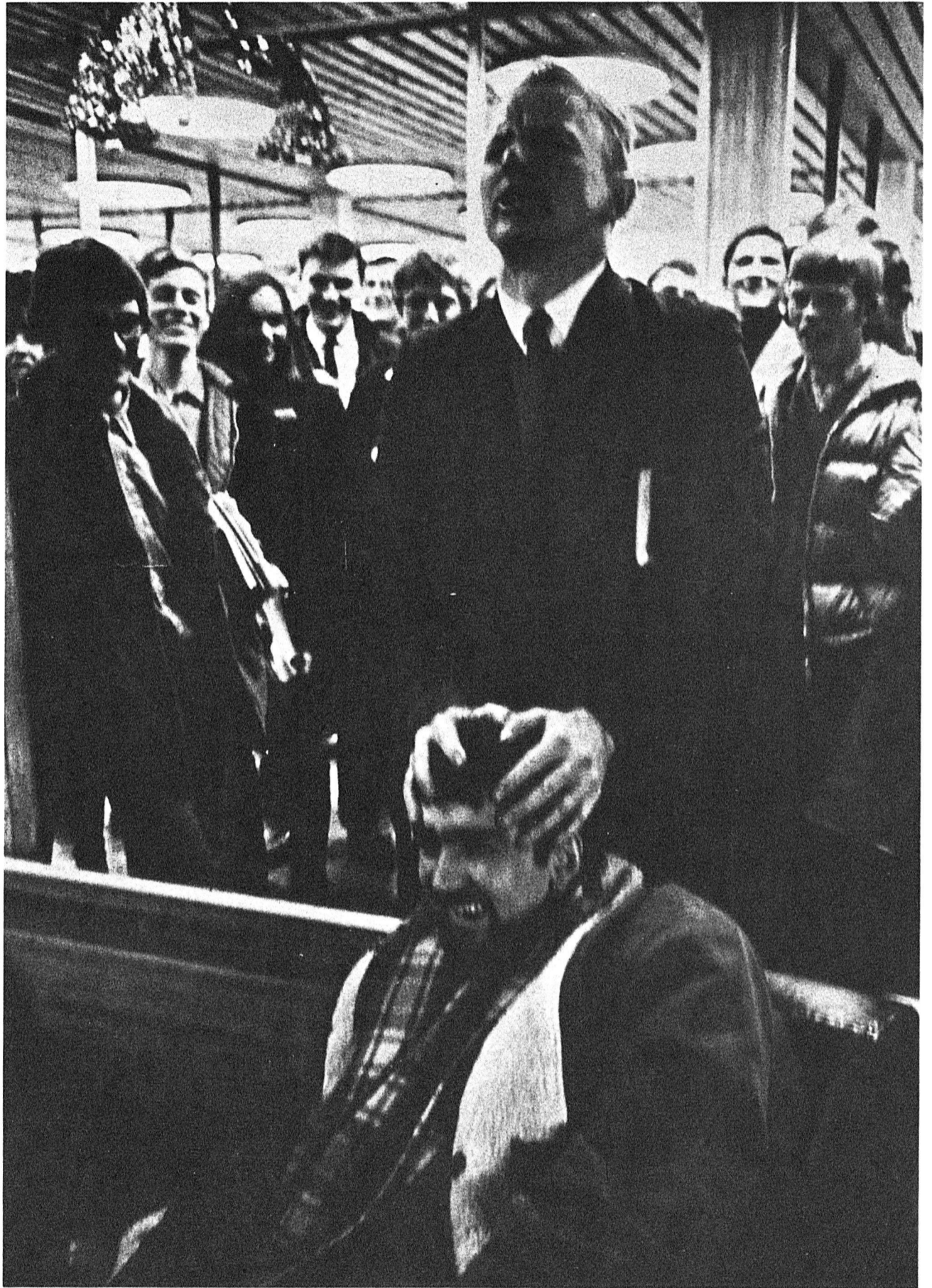
Christians should fully understand that, too. The gospel treats the world in utter seriousness. At the centre of the gospel stands the proclamation of the incarnation of God. But exactly and specifically: the incarnation of God. The Christian message draws men into the discipleship of Jesus of Nazareth and thus into his history, society and future.

That message does not conceal the fact that the final point of reference of this man is God. If God is ideologically denied, then man is threatened to become dissolved in his history, society and his future and he becomes imprisoned in his imminence and in his worldly projects.

The ultimate future of man

The penultimate becomes the ultimate for him. His total destiny then depends on his accomplishments. He lives with the possibilities of happiness and euphoria as they emerge in moments of his successes.

But he also lives in frustration and despair as



EVANGELISTIC RELIGION—Both Christianity and Marxism have seen the fervor of those who have found the One True Way—and have felt the scorn of those who do not believe.

they are given in the situation of defeat and guilt.

Over against all of this the Christian message speaks of the transcendence of grace as the ultimate dimension of human existence. The transcendence: man is never used up completely in his social and historical conditions. His future is greater than the future of his accomplishments. He is more than he is.

And the Christian message speaks of grace: our salvation does not depend on our efficiency or on the failure of our attempts. That which is ultimate is not our accomplishment. The ultimate is not our sin—so, too, it is not death for us. The ultimate, the proper future of man, is grace.

The real task of Christians in their encounter with Marxists appears to me to be to testify to

this condition of being human. The church's reason for existing (*raison d'être*) lies exactly in this witness—in all societies, especially in a Marxist society.

This is her authentic difference from the society; it is a difference that does not set her at a distance from others but one that unites her with them in Christian solidarity, a practical proof of the transcendence of grace.

If the church fashions and promulgates "laws" instead of this message, then she understands herself as an ideological antipower set against Marxism (and how often has she done so). If she does that, then she misses her unique and most distinctive contribution and witness for the society; she becomes worthless salt.