

A 2014 Catholic-Christian Re-reading of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party of 1848: Common Concerns & Contradictory Strategies¹

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1. A Striking Reader-Response Experience

What a striking experience was my preparation for this essay! I had been reading the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis. Then, I began re-reading Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto*.² This short text is probably the best known and most influential text in the whole of Marxist-Communist literature. Going through Section 1 of the *Manifesto* I asked myself several times: "Who is speaking here? Karl Marx or Pope Francis?" No wonder an American newspaper, in its reaction to the publication of *Evangelii gaudium*, spoke of its content as "pure Marxism"!

For example, who wrote the following text? The bourgeois culture "has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has

¹ The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* is also called the *Communist Manifesto* or simply the *Manifesto* in the Prefaces by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to successive editions. The edition of the *Manifesto* I have used "is a reproduction of the translation made by Samuel Moore in 1888 from the original German text of 1848 and revised by Friedrich Engels. Included are Engels' annotations for the English 1888 edition and the German 1890 edition, and the authors' prefaces to the various editions" (See Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. With an Introduction by A.J.P. Taylor, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967).

² The *Manifesto*, is divided into four Sections. There is no other numbering system, except two or three paragraphs in which the points named are numbered. Still, the original paragraphing used by Marx and Engels is faithfully preserved in all editions I have consulted (e.g. Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965). So it is easy to number the paragraphs within each Section. Consequently, when referring to a certain passage, I will give the number of the Section, followed by the number of the paragraph. So, for example, 4.1 refers to the 1st paragraph of the 4th Section.

drowned the most heavenly ecstasies [...] in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in the place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. [...] The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation” (*Manifesto* 1.14-16).

And who wrote the following text? “No to the new idolatry of money! One cause of this situation [i.e. of our incapacity to feel compassion at the outcry of the poor] is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. *Exodus* 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption” (*Evangelii gaudium* 55).

There is certainly something in common between the two texts just quoted. This common something is the sincere concern for the life and dignity of every human being. At the same time, of course, throughout the *Manifesto*, the Christian reader finds thoughts and words that are totally at odds with the Christian understanding of reality (for example, when it speaks of “religious and political illusions” [*Manifesto* 1.14] or of “law, morality, religion” as “so many bourgeois prejudices” [*Manifesto* 1.47]). Moreover, proceeding in the reading, little by little one realizes that the social phenomena blamed above upon the bourgeoisie are not considered by Marx and Engels as simply negative phenomena. They are the unstoppable results of the iron laws of the historical-materialist development of humanity. They are the necessary stepping stones

for such development and, as such, they must be brought to their full completion by Communism!

This curious mixture of Christian and anti-Christian elements in the *Manifesto* has determined the format and the content of my essay. In it I try to pin down the two basic influences at work in the mind of the authors of the *Manifesto*. In this way I hope to be able to answer for myself the questions that have kept cropping up in my re-reading of this epoch-making text: How could such a mix-up be possible? After solving this mix-up, does anything of value remain?

It is already clear, of course, that points of contact between the *Manifesto* and the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church are possible only on the level of basic concerns. On all other levels, radical contradictions are at work.³ This is only to be expected, since the basic presupposition of the *Manifesto* is that there is no God, while the whole of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church is grounded on the reality that “God is.” After all, whether “God is” or “God is not” makes a difference. It makes the most fundamental difference. Any real dialogue between Christians and Marxists should begin with facing the question with which St. Thomas Aquinas begins his enquiry in the *Summa Theologiae*: “*An Deus sit. Whether God exists.*”

2. The Two Guiding Frameworks of the Thought of the *Manifesto*

If one reflects on the curious “mix-up” present in the *Manifesto* and continues to read the *Manifesto*, one easily realizes that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were (inevitably, given their historical background) influenced by a twofold tradition of thought. The first is the more-than-two-millennia-old “Great Code”, i.e. the great Biblical Narrative which is at the root of the faith of Catholic Christianity.⁴ The second thought tradition is the two-hundred-years

³ Skipping over these contradictions does not help to undertake a real dialogue. See, for example, He Yan, “Fanerhuiyihou Tianzhujiao yu Makesizhuyi zai Zhongguo Duihuade Kenengxing (The Possibility of Dialogue in China between the Post-Vatican II Catholic Church and Marxism)”, in Peter Choy – Jing Baolu ed., *Tianzhujiao Sixiang yu Wenhua / Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*.(2013) pp. 365-386.

⁴ Cf. Northrope Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, edited by Alvin A. Lee, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006 [original edition 1982].

old “Copernican Revolution” in human thinking initiated by Immanuel Kant and brought to completion by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s idealistic philosophy.

Let us deal, first, with the Biblical Narrative thought tradition.

2.1 The great Biblical Narrative of the Sacred Scriptures of Catholic Christianity lies behind two fundamental aspects of the *Manifesto*

2.1.1 The first point of contact between the *Manifesto* and the Catholic Christian tradition is the pervasive sincere social concern for the plight of the oppressed

As far as social concerns are concerned there is a remarkable convergence between the *Communist Manifesto* and the Social Magisterium of the Catholic Church as represented, most recently, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis (24 November, 2013).

When reading the *Manifesto*, it is not difficult to perceive the sincere concern Marx and Engels had for the plight of the poor and the oppressed. Let me quote just one or two passages, comparing them with one or two passages from Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e. capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed—a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman (*Manifesto* 1.30-31).

Let us now listen to what Pope Francis has to say:

Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.

Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded (*Evangelii gaudium* 53).

Let us take another passage from the *Manifesto*:

The average price of wage labour is the minimum wage, i.e. that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer. [...] We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labour [...] All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only insofar as the interest of the ruling class requires it. [...] In bourgeois society, capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality (*Manifesto* 2.22-23).

On his part, Pope Francis writes:

While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. [...] A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. [...] In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule (*Evangelii gaudium* 56).

The root of violence in society is detected by both Marx-Engels and Pope Francis in the social inequality and injustice that undermine the social fabric. The clear perception of the destructiveness of an unjust society is expressed thus in the *Manifesto*: “We traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat” (*Manifesto* 1.51).

The same perception is expressed by Pope Francis: “Inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system [...]. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death” (*Evangelii gaudium* 59).

Within the point of contact there is, however, a fundamental difference. For Pope Francis, the situation of inequality that spawns violence need not be. Human abuse of freedom is responsible for it. For Marx-Engels the situation of inequality is bound to be a necessary stepping stone in the development of humanity. Historical-materialistic determinism is “responsible” for it.

2.1.2 The second point of contact between the *Manifesto* and the Catholic Christian tradition is the overarching development of humanity as understood by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

The view of human history proper to Karl Marx’s historical materialism appears to borrow its overarching shape from the Biblical narrative that begins with the Story of Eden, where God conversed familiarly with man and woman, and ends with the vision of the New Jerusalem, where humanity recovers its primordial familiarity with God in an unspeakably heightened way.

Section 1 of the *Manifesto* begins with this sentence: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (*Manifesto* 1.1). In a Note to this first sentence, Engels

explains that the history meant here is *written* history. As for the pre-history of humanity, Engels refers approvingly to the recent discovery by historians that pre-historical society practiced “common ownership of land”. This was “the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland”, the “primitive Communistic society”. [...] With the dissolution of these primeval communities, society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes.”

So, according to the *Manifesto*, humanity began in a Communistic way. Again according to the *Manifesto*, it will also end that way. Even though Marx and Engels forcefully attack the utopias of other movements of thought (disdainfully labelling them as “the new social Gospel”, the “duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem”), they themselves end Section 2 with this paragraph:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (*Manifesto* 2.73).

“The free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” What an extraordinary sentence this is! All the more so against the background of 150 years of Communist revolutions and Communist regimes! I wonder whether throughout the Social Magisterium of the Catholic Church we can find a

sentence that expresses better the Catholic Church's view of an adequate social order...

Of course, nothing in the other sources of Karl Marx's thought justifies such a utopic optimism. This optimism is fundamentally inconsistent with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' frame of mind. This is determined, as we will see in a moment, by the Hegelian triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The concluding sentence of Section 2 of the *Manifesto* is pure "Messianic" optimism and its roots are in the Catholic Christian Sacred Scriptures. "Messianism" is a word frequently used to denote the social ideal of Karl Marx. After all, Karl Marx was of Jewish descent and was baptized as a Christian. We can also say, however, that Karl Marx's Messianism is a "Messianism that has gone mad". This leads me to consider the second thought tradition that, like an overarching framework, determines the thought content of the *Manifesto*.

2.2 Immanuel Kant's "Copernican Revolution" and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy of absolute idealism are the second thought tradition that radically determines the thought content of the *Manifesto*, radically opposing it to the Catholic-Christian thought tradition. In fact, Kant's agnosticism and Hegel's idealism are at the roots of modern atheism

As far as the basic understanding of existence and humanity is concerned, there could not be greater divergence between the views of Marx and Engels and those of the Catholic Church. This divergence is philosophical, before being theological.

Karl Marx's philosophy is, as Karl Marx himself said, "Hegel's philosophy turned upon its head", that is, it is the materialist version of Hegel's idealism. Hegel's idealism is the full flowering of Immanuel Kant's philosophy of agnosticism. Its triadic development of thesis-antithesis-synthesis relativizes all truth. This is due especially to the crucial role given to the "antithesis" element, understood not only as "opposite", but also as "contradictory," i.e. not only as a supplement of the thesis, but as the negation of the thesis. Hegel likes to speak of "the power of negation". The end result of such a philosophical background is that a) Truth is

radically relativized, and b) Humankind is seen as developing deterministically according to inflexible historical-materialistic laws.

2.2.1 Truth is Relative

A relativistic view of truth pervades the *Manifesto*. The authors do not tire of reminding us of the fact that truth is relative to the economic conditions of those who think. Eloquently, they challenge directly the upholders of so-called “eternal truths”:

Don't wrangle with us so long as you apply, to our intended abolition of bourgeois property, the standard of your bourgeois notions of freedom, culture, law, etc. Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all, whose essential character and direction are determined by the economical conditions of the existence of your class.

The selfish misconception that induces you to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason, the social forms springing from your present mode of production and form of property— historical relations that rise and disappear in the progress of production—this misconception you share with every ruling class that has preceded you (*Manifesto* 2.37-38).

The *Manifesto* only thrice targets religion directly. Each time, its attack on religion is issued on the basis of a relativistic theory of truth. Religion is mentioned the first time in Section 1 when it speaks of “exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions” (*Manifesto* 1.14) and, more indirectly, of “ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions” (*Manifesto* 1.18) swept away by the unstoppable development of history.

The second time, also in Section 1, when speaking of “the proletariat”, it says:

Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests (*Manifesto* 1.47).

The third time is a more expanded attack on religion and thought in general in Section 2:

The charges against Communism made from a religious, philosophical, and, generally, from an ideological standpoint, are not deserving of serious examination.

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes in character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class (*Manifesto* 2.57-59).

And then the *Manifesto* goes on for one whole page to stress that "the ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge" typical of a bourgeois society (*Manifesto* 2.61).

Such a relativistic view of truth leads to the flat denial of truths that the Social Magisterium of the Church considers as unchangeable pointers that should guide our reflection on, and planning of, social transformations. For example: the *Manifesto* questions that "the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man's own labour [...] is [...] the ground work of all personal freedom, activity and independence" (*Manifesto* 2.14).

The only absolute truths for Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels appear to be the "wheel of history", of which we will speak in a moment, and the materialistic laws propelling it. It is the

understanding of these laws and action in conformity with these laws that defines the specific Communist contribution to humanity.⁵

2.2.2 Human History Is Determined by the “Wheel of History” That Cannot Be Rolled Back

The triadic development of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is the basic law of the development of human history, of the turning of the “Wheel of History”, as this development is called in the *Manifesto* (1.45). Nothing can stand in the way of this triadic dynamism, whether this dynamism is of spirit (as in Hegel) or of matter (as in Marx). For Karl Marx it is pure stupidity to think that we can withstand the force of this development. The task of the social thinker is that of “comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole” (*Manifesto* 1.43). So, give free play to the historical forces at work in human society! Let the disintegrating factors present in the social fabric work to the full extent! Do not offer cures for the social ills! You are only going against the current of the historical transformation of society. You are only condemning yourself to failure. Let the strength of the antithesis uplift the thesis into the synthesis. The violent overthrow of the existing order, this is the only way forward!

The last paragraphs of the *Manifesto* read as follow:

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. [...]

⁵ Today, even these absolute truths appear to have faded and to have been superseded by one single remaining pragmatic truth: the necessarily unchallenged supremacy of “Party leadership”, i.e. the Party’s continued hold on power. 165 years after the *Manifesto*, this is reflected in the so-called Document 9 issued on 22 April, 2013 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party: “We must not permit the dissemination of opinions that oppose the Party’s theory or political line, the publication of views contrary to decisions that represent the central leadership’s views, or the spread of political rumours that defame the image of the Party or the nation”.

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! (*Manifesto* 4.8 & 12)

So, according to the *Manifesto*, the only realistic social strategy for the development of humanity is that championed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. All other forms of social activism are blind to the socio-economic laws of historical development. They reveal a “total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history” (*Manifesto* 3.3). That is why all their efforts are fruitless. This is true, according to the *Manifesto*, of all the social movements discussed in it (some of them very close to what we would call Catholic Social Teaching): All forms of Reactionary Socialism (Feudal Socialism; Clerical Socialism; Petty-Bourgeois Socialism; German, or ‘True’ Socialism); all forms of Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism; all forms of Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism.

Let me stop for a moment on the first two and the last two kinds of thinkers and movements that Marx and Engels consider their competitors in winning the allegiance of the proletariat, of the working class, “the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands” (*Manifesto* 1.43). I choose these four types because, when reading the *Manifesto*, I was vividly reminded of the Saint whom St. John Paul II proclaimed in 1988 to be the “Father and Teacher of Youth”, St. John Bosco. If Marx and Engels were right, it would mean that St. John Bosco, the father and teacher of poor and abandoned youth, begging at the door of rich and poor alike to find the necessary resources, was wrong. Of course, my non-relativist view of truth and my conviction that history is led, not by materialistic blind forces, but by the almighty and loving God “Who is”, assures me that it was Marx and Engels who were wrong, and St. John Bosco who was right.

The first two kinds of social competitors are what the *Manifesto* calls Feudal Socialism and Clerical Socialism. It is the

criticism of modern bourgeois society by members of the traditional aristocracy and clergy. Marx and Engels have no respect for such criticism, because it is not backed up by practice; it remains on the level of words:

In ordinary life, despite their high-falutin phrases, they stoop to pick up the golden apples dropped from the tree of industry, and to barter truth, love, and honour for traffic in wool, beetroot-sugar, and potato spirits.

As the parson has ever gone hand in hand with the landlord, so has Clerical Socialism with Feudal Socialism.

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat (*Manifesto* 3.9-11).

The either-or pattern of thinking characteristic of Karl Marx (e.g. either matter or spirit, the two cannot be conceived as co-existing) prevents him from perceiving that Catholic Christianity can affirm both marriage and celibacy, both private property and evangelical poverty, both State and equality in brotherhood. Superficially, there are points of contact with the Communist attempt to abolish e.g. private property and marriage. In depth, there is a complete difference of context.

The last two kinds are what Marx and Engels call the Conservative (or Bourgeois) Socialism and the Critical-Utopian Socialism.

Regarding Conservative Socialism, the *Manifesto* says:

A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society.

To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity [...].

The Socialist bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat (*Manifesto* 3.36-37 & 39).

They seek “to depreciate every revolutionary movement in the eyes of the working class, by showing that no mere political reform, but only a change in the material conditions of existence, in economical relations, could be of any advantage to them” (*Manifesto* 3.40).

Regarding Critical-Utopian Socialism, the *Manifesto* says:

In the formation of their plans they are conscious of caring chiefly for the interests of the working class, as being the most suffering class. Only from the point of view of being the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for them.

[...] They want to improve the conditions of every member of society, even that of the most favoured. [...]

Hence, they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary, action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means [...] and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel (*Manifesto* 3.50-52).

They, therefore, endeavour, and that consistently, to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonisms. They still dream of experimental realization of their social Utopias [...] duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem—and to realize all these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois (*Manifesto* 3.55).

They, therefore, violently oppose all political action on the part of the working class; such action, according to them,

can only result from blind unbelief in the new Gospel” (*Manifesto* 2.31).

It is clear that, because of their denial of God, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are blind to the social power of “peaceful means”. This power was clearly seen by 20th century people like Mahatma Ghandi of India’s independence and Lech Wałęsa of Solidarnosc, because of their affirmation of God “Who is”.

3. The enduring contribution of the Marxist analysis of social reality for today’s universal discourse about human rights

My re-reading of the *Communist Manifesto* not only made me appreciate once more Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ sincere and deep concern for the plight of the oppressed masses. It also impressed on me the enduring value of another aspect of Karl Marx’ s analysis of society. This other aspect is the calling into question the sincerity of the bourgeois concern with “human rights”. This aspect apparently coincides with Karl Marx’s view of truth as relative. Actually, however, it is to be distinguished from it. In fact, while the relativist view of truth is untenable, this other aspect focuses our attention on a real tendency of our human psychology, namely, the ease with which we rationalize our motivations, giving beautiful colours to rather shadowy, often unconscious, “hidden agendas”.

Karl Marx has been called one of the Three Great Masters of Suspicion (Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud being the other two).⁶ These three thinkers encourage us to doubt the genuineness of our intentions: Karl Marx asks us to see whether it is not motives of material comfort that rule over us; Friedrich Nietzsche asks us to see whether our humble service of God is not an excuse for renouncing our human responsibilities regarding self and society; Sigmund Freud asks us to see whether it is not unsatisfied sexual

⁶ As far as I know, the phrase “Masters of Suspicion” was coined by Paul Ricoeur.

needs that really drive our thought, speech, and behaviour, in search of compensatory satisfaction.

As far as Karl Marx is concerned, take, for example, his subtle criticism of the class egotism underlying a bourgeois promotion of “human rights” of the individual: “By ‘individual’ you mean no other person than the bourgeois, than the middle-class owner of property” (*Manifesto* 2.31).

This call to be aware of how easily we cheat ourselves is picked up by Pope Francis: “Sadly, even human rights can be used as a justification for an inordinate defence of individual rights or the rights of the richer peoples. [...] It must be reiterated that “the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others” (*Evangelii gaudium* 190).

4. The Way Ahead: *Communist Manifesto* or Catholic Social Teaching?

Ironically, concerning the Way Ahead, we must say that the basic social concerns of Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* are being carried forward today not by the surviving Communist Parties, but by the Catholic Church in her Social Magisterium! For me this means that it is only under God “Who is” that those basic social concerns can be nurtured and brought to fruition for the well-being of the weak and downtrodden in society. So, let me conclude my essay with a few quotations that recall the way I began it, i.e. words that are being pronounced by the Catholic Church and that, if not warned beforehand, you would think are being quoted from the *Communist Manifesto*. Today, it is the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church that calls on us to hear the “cry of the poor” and oppressed!

Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. [...] Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the

powerless. [...] Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. [...] Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor (*Evangelii gaudium* 53-54).

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid (*Evangelii gaudium* 187).

Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them” (*Evangelii gaudium* 189).

Is not this the proper way forward towards that “association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (*Manifesto* 2.73)?