

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 9 no. 4 (1961): 611–626

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Karl Marx: Seed of the Prophets

JOHN F. DOHERTY

ONE of the fundamental paradoxes in Marx's approach to history is that while he regarded the coming of the classless society as inevitable, he insisted on the need for revolutionary action to bring it about. This paradox in the works of Marx became a major issue in early twentieth century Russian Communism.¹ The nature of this paradox can best be presented by citing Marx himself.

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating.²

Men are not, therefore, simply acted upon. They too act and their action is part of the dialectical call that will bring history to its ultimate goal. Men cannot prevent reality reaching its goal, but they can hasten or slow down its movements. This latter point emerges in a letter of Marx to Kugelmann, dated April 11, 1871. In it, he treats of harmonizing inevitability with the accidental character of much that happens:

World history would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favorable chances. It

¹ I refer to the struggle between Lenin who urged revolutionary action and Kautsky who relied on inevitability.

² Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", MARX AND ENGELS: *SELECTED WORKS* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955), vol. 2, p. 403.

would, on the other hand, be of a very mystical nature, if 'accidents' played no part. These accidents naturally form part of the general course of development and are compensated by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very much dependent on such 'accidents', including the accident of the character of the people who first head the movement.³

This paradoxical view of Marx, if we may so term it, reflects a cleavage in the man himself between the ruthless realist and the idealist. There is nothing in the principle of the dialectic which can lead one to such a happy finality as that envisioned in the classless society. It is all very well to state that under the capitalist system the issue will be simplified down to two classes, and that under the system that is to be ushered in by the overthrow of the capitalist society, there will be only one class and that, furthermore, since private property will have been abolished, class war will be impossible. Yet even the most hopeless sentimentalist could foresee the development of class antagonisms strong enough to disrupt the proletarian state and Marx was normally not a sentimentalist. Why, then, did he fall into this contradiction? To attempt to answer this question we must understand the man, for though Marx was a materialist philosopher, he was also a Jew, a man sprung from the seed of the prophets; a man in whom despite his condemnation of bourgeois morality moral indignation literally burned.

Karl Marx was born in the year 1818 in the town of Trier in the German Rhineland. Though his father was a lawyer, his ancestors on both his mother's and father's side had been Rabbis as far back as the family tree can be traced. He was born into a period of political unrest, particularly taxing on the Jewish community of the Rhineland which had experienced the liberating force of the French Revolutionary armies only to be thrown back again into disillusionment by the *decret infame* of March 17, 1808 which restricted their freedom of movement and forbade them earning a living as they wished. With the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the old anti-Jewish laws were again put into effect by the restored German princes, thus piling

³ *Ibid.* p. 464.

restriction on restriction and forcing the Jews once again back into their Ghetto.

Karl's father seems to have weathered the storm of changing political fortunes fairly well. He had taken full advantage of the new liberties granted to the Jews and had entered the service of the State. From all accounts, he was moderately successful at the time when the 1816 anti-Jewish laws were passed forbidding Jews to hold public office. These laws posed a difficult problem for many Jews at the time, since they now must choose between entering the Ghetto or abandoning Judaism and becoming members of the Christian Church. Marx's biographers agree that the choice between the Ghetto and Christianity was not a difficult one for Herschel Marx to make. No ties apparently bound him to the Synagogue. On the contrary, he seems to have been a rather passionate Prussian patriot and monarchist, interested in respectability as the head of a German bourgeois family. A disciple of Leibnitz, and Voltaire and Lessing and Kant, "he held vaguely deist views and saw no moral or social obstacle to complete conformity with the mildly enlightened Lutheranism of his Prussian neighbors."⁴ He was received into the church early in 1817, one year before Karl's birth. For Karl's mother, the step was not quite so easy and she did not succeed in making it until the death of her parents eight years later.

Whether the conversion of Herschel Marx and his family was merely a matter of political opportunism, as Nicholaevsky and Maenchen-Helfen imply, or a matter of religious and social emancipation as Nehring states, is a complicated problem. It may have involved elements of both. At any rate it does not seem to have involved any profound religious experience.

Yet it seems that the conversion of the father could not erase the remembrance of the son. Berlin tells us that in his last years "his references to individual Jews are violent to a degree: his origin had become a personal stigma which he was

⁴ Isaiah Berlin, *KARL MARX, HIS LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 27.

unable to avoid pointing out in others.”⁶ It is true that his attacks on the Jews are scathing to an extreme. At the age of twenty-five, he wrote “the Hebrew faith is repellent to me”. Again a few years later in an article in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* in which he comments on a series of articles by Bruno Bauer on the Jewish question and recognizes the religious questions of the day as of no more than social significance, he states:

Let us not search for the secret of the Jews in their religion but for the secret of their religion in the living Jews. What is the worldly foundation of Jewery? Self-interest and the satisfying of practical wants. What is the worldly worship of the Jews? Huckstering. What is their worldly god? Money. Very well. The emancipation from huckstering and money, that is, from real practical Jewry would be the real self emancipation of our time.⁶

These attacks might be explained as the over-reaction of a non-conformist, yet such an explanation would not cut deep enough. Wilson points out that the animus of Marx’s anti-Semitic writings “is directed mainly against the Jew as money lender or as a truckler to bourgeois society”.⁷ Yet although, the economic evils of bourgeois Society were a primary preoccupation of Marx throughout his life, these evils as reflected in Judaism were far from the essence of Judaism. Money lending was one of the few occupations left open to the Jews under medieval legislation. It was moreover formally closed to the Christian due to the moral prescription against usury. In addition, “the overwhelming taxation levied upon the Jewish money-lenders compelled them to keep raising the rates of interest which they charged. Their enforced rapacity led to resentment, and insecurity raised the rates still higher.”⁸ Thus a stereotype of the Jew developed which tended to obscure the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁶ Franz Mehring, KARL MARX (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1948), p. 72.

⁷ Edmund Wilson, TO THE FINLAND STATION, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Anchor Book, 1940), p. 208.

⁸ Louis Finkelstein, THE JEWS: THEIR HISTORY, CULTURE AND RELIGION (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, second edition, 1955), p. 229.

real contribution of Judaism to Western society. Marx in accepting this stereotype overlooked the contribution, namely "the characteristic moral genius of Judaism". Yet, paradoxically enough, this moral sense is strong in Marx. It is this more than anything else that gives power to his writings. "If he is contemptuous of his race, it is primarily, perhaps, with the anger of Moses, at finding the children of Israel dancing before the Golden Calf."⁹ The prophetic fervor and burning conviction underlying his condemnations cannot be understood apart from the moral sense of the Judaism he so roundly condemned any more than Comte's RELIGION OF HUMANITY can be understood apart from his Catholic origins nor at a later date Joyce's ULYSSES apart from the Irish Catholicism against which he revolted.

By his father's conversion and his own early baptism Marx lost his membership in the Jewish community, but he could not destroy his Jewish heredity and his Jewish spirit and become the obedient servant of the Gentile civilization as his father had done. He revolted against the standards and ideals of the petty bourgeois society in which he had been brought up, yet once he had tasted the new knowledge he could not return to the Talmud any more than he could return to the Ghetto. The only way open to him was the revolutionary tradition which was then at the height of its prestige and popularity. In this he found satisfaction at once for his conscious hostility to bourgeois civilization and for the deeper revolt of his own repressed religious instincts.

The alienation described above was woven into the entire pattern of Marx's life. His education and especially his contact with the young Hegelians in Berlin intensified this alienation. While it might be said that the English, French and American revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century were social and political revolutions, the German revolution was predominantly intellectual. It aimed at changing not merely power relations but the attitudes of men. Its main concern was the relation between science and theology. Hegel's dialectic

⁹ Wilson, *op. cit.* p. 209.

of progress from Art to Religion to the synthesis of Science, which while abolishing Art and Religion as such would conserve their best elements in rational form and elevate them to a higher level of understanding, was the starting point of all subsequent discussions. At first, the young German intellectuals thought Hegel had solved everything, but it soon became apparent that Hegelian thought was very ambiguous and explosive. To some of them it seemed that, if Hegel was right, Science was unnecessary since it merely confirmed theological thought. Others, following the lead of Strauss, introduced the notion of alienation into the relationship between Religion and Philosophy. God, for them, was nothing but man alienated from himself and this alienation had to be abolished. Yet, for their attempt to abolish it at the University of Berlin, Marx and Bruno Bauer were expelled on the charge of atheism. This closed the possibility of an academic career to Marx and led him into the path of radicalism.

Shortly after his expulsion from Berlin, Marx wrote his first article for the *Rheinische Zeitung*. This paper was suppressed a little more than a year later and within a few months all the publications of the left-Hegelians were banned by the Prussian government.¹⁰ Not long after the left-Hegelians themselves disbanded. They had turned from criticism of religion to discussing the forms of human alienation and to mutual accusations of theologizing and of refusing to carry through their respective ideas. In *The Holy Family* Marx levelled this charge of theologizing at the Bauer brothers, while Stirner in turn accused Marx of the same tendency. It was in the course of this movement that Marx developed his idea of human history, whose meaning Marx placed in man's progress from a state of non-alienation in which man's potential is undeveloped to a state of alienation in which his potential is developed by the various forms of alienation (namely, class struggle, private property, religion) to emerge in the proletarian society in

¹⁰ Boris Nicolaievsky and Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *KARL MARX: MAN AND FIGHTER* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1936), p. 43-74.

which man's potential is fully developed and in which alienation will no longer exist.¹¹

Hegel had made an attempt to describe the dialectical process of history as a gradual approximation to God's will by means of the step-by-step reconciliation of opposing forces. To Marx, however, history was not progress through reconciliation but progress through cataclysm, a view much closer than Hegel's to the Biblical theme leading up to the final terrible battle that finishes the work of "Redemption" and beats down rebellion forever.¹² This leads us to a discussion of the prophetic element in Marx's thought.

The various biographers of Marx¹³ as well as numerous commentators on his work have all made use of the term 'prophetic' to characterize certain elements of the Marxian synthesis. Schumpeter, for example, states:

He (Marx) was a prophet and in order to understand the nature of this achievement we must visualize it in the setting of his own time. It was the zenith of bourgeois rationalization and the nadir of bourgeois civilization, the time of mechanistic materialism, of a cultural milieu which had as yet betrayed no sign that a new art and new way of life were in the womb, and which rioted in most repulsive banality. Faith in any real sense was rapidly falling away from all classes of society and with it the only ray of light... died from the working-man's world.

Now to millions of human hearts the Marxian message of the terrestrial paradise of socialism meant a new ray of light and a new meaning of life.¹⁴

According to Schumpeter in the passage cited above and to others who deal with the prophetic element in Marx, Marx was prophetic because he gave hope to oppressed humanity at a time when they needed it. The bliss of the classless society

¹¹ I am indebted to Professor Dahrendorf's lectures at Columbia University for the above analysis of the intellectual climate in which the young Marx developed.

¹² Edward Heiman, "Atheistic Theocracy", *Social Research* XX (1953), p. 313 ff.

¹³ I refer to Berlin, Mehring and Nicolaievsky.

¹⁴ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *CAPITALISM, SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY* (New York: Harper and Brothers, third edition, 1950), p. 5-6.

was something they could look forward to. It was a promise for the future and since the prediction was future-oriented Marx was prophetic.

Obviously in calling Marx a prophet we are dealing with an analogy and Shumpeter is quite conscious of this. Yet there can be more than one point of similarity in analogous terms. Consequently, it might be well to consider prophecy and the prophet in their own light and to see what further light can be thrown on Marx and his work by the use of this analogy.

Prophecy is essentially a religious term and as such has come to be identified for the most part with certain elements of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and in particular with a group of Old Testament characters called "The Prophets". To get at the essence of prophecy, then, we can do no better than to look briefly at these prophets and consider what it was that earned them this title.

There are, in general, two definitions of prophecy in use today. The first of these tends to prejudice the issue somewhat by starting that prophecy is "foretelling the future". The other definition is a reaction against this exclusive preoccupation with the future and considers prophecy to be "forthtelling" rather than foretelling. Actually, it seems that both definitions leave something unsaid. For a study of the Old Testament prophets indicates that they were both foretellers and forthtellers. While there is a predictive element in prophecy, it should not be allowed to crowd out the other elements contained therein. If both foretelling and forthtelling are taken into consideration in our study of Marx, they will, I think, open up new insights into the extent to which Marx was actually of the "seed of the prophets".¹⁵

Another element essential to Old Testament prophecy which should not be overlooked is that the Hebrew prophets

¹⁵ The ideas on Prophecy contained in this paper are taken from H. H. Rowley, *PROPHECY AND RELIGION IN ANCIENT CHINA AND ISRAEL* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956) and from Claude Tresmontant, *LA DOCTRINE MORALE DES PROPHETES D'ISRAEL* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1959).

were for the most part conscious of a mission. They had answered a call which could not be rejected. Sometimes this call came in a dramatic experience of which the prophet himself has left us an account.¹⁶ It is quite possible that no Hebrew prophet would have ventured to prophesy without an experience of some kind. In summing up the essence of prophecy, then, we might say that the prophet is one who is in the state of announcing a message which it has become his mission to make known.

From the above discussion, it is clear to what extent Marx may be called a prophet. From all accounts he was, like the Hebrew prophets, a man with a sense of mission and with a message he felt obliged to convey. Yet there was a difference as Berlin points out:

Marx had no new ethical or social ideal to press upon mankind; he did not plead for a change of heart.

Designed though it is to appeal to the intellect, his language is that of a herald and prophet, speaking in the name not of human beings but of the universal law itself, seeking not to rescue nor to improve, but to warn and to condemn, to reveal the truth and, above all, to refute falsehood.¹⁷

The similarities between the language of Marx and that of the Hebrew prophets is indeed striking, but the similarity goes beyond the mere form of the message to the content itself, namely, reform. Marx's stinging condemnation of the bourgeois capitalists, for example, cannot but recall Isaiah's denunciation of the large estate holders, "who joined house to house and land to land"¹⁸ or Micah's condemnation of the same type of greed. Again, Amos's invectives against the commercial dishonesty prevalent in his day must strike a familiar note to a student of Marx.

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and would bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, when will the new moon pass that we may sell grain and the Sabbath that we may offer wheat for sale. Making the *ephah* small and the price great, and falsifying the scales;

¹⁶ Cf. Amos 7/14 ff.; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1/4; Ezekiel 1; Hosea 1/2.

¹⁷ Berlin, *op. cit.* p. 6-7.

¹⁸ Isaiah 5/8.

buying the poor for silver and the needy in exchange for a pair of sandals, and selling the refuse of the grain.¹⁹

In varying ways, and in varying terms, most of the eighth-century prophets whose writings have come down to us denounced the oppression and greed and drunkenness, the wanton display of wealth and the fornication rampant amongst the wealthy in both of the Israelite states, and pronounced strong woes on those responsible for these evils.²⁰ Micah compares this cruel oppression to cannibalism, declaiming against those "who hate the good and love evil; who pluck off their skin from off them and their flesh from off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people; they flay their skins from off them and break their bones: yes, they chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron."²¹

It is clear on reading these passages and the others referred to below that the Hebrew prophets did not deal in moral maxims but in hot anger at the evils of the day. Similarly, Marx was not given to moralizing, yet the biting sarcasm and indignation with which he lashed out against the evils of his day strike a familiar note for one who has read the Hebrew prophets. To cite some examples from his work: in *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*, he has a ringing condemnation of the bourgeoisie:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous cash payment. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy waters of egotistical calculation.... In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct brutal exploitation.²²

¹⁹ Amos 8/4.

²⁰ Cf. also Amos 2/6-8; 3/15; 6/4; 5/12; Joel 1/4; Micah 2/2; 2/11; Isaiah 1/11; 1/17; 1/23; 10/2.

²¹ Micah 3/2.

²² Karl Marx, *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, Gateway Editions Inc., 1954) p. 12.

Again, in an article appearing in the New York Herald Tribune for June 25, 1853, on "The British Rule in India", Marx writes:

There cannot, however, remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindustan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindustan had to suffer before.²³

Marx then goes on to quote with approval what Sir Stamford Raffles, the British Governor of Java, said of the Dutch East India Company and states that this quotation characterizes British Colonial rule no less than Dutch.

The West Indian planter... employed all the existing machinery of despotism to squeeze from the people their utmost mite of contribution, the last dregs of their labor, and thus aggravated the evils of a capricious and semi-barbarous government, by working it with all the practised ingenuity of politicians and all the monopolizing selfishness of traders.²⁴

Writing a month later on the future of the British Rule in India, Marx does a little foretelling, that the English bourgeoisie will not improve the social conditions of the Indian masses but will instead "appropriate the people". He then asks: "Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected progress without dragging individuals through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?"²⁵

Later in the same work, in a much more stinging invective against the bourgeoisie, Marx is extremely 'forth-telling'.

The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies where it goes naked. They are the defenders of property, but did any revolutionary party ever originate agrarian revolutions like those in Bengal, in Madras and in Bombay? Did they not in India, to borrow an expression of that great robber, Lord Olive himself, resort to atrocious extortion, when simple

²³ Karl Marx "The British Rule in India", MARX AND ENGELS: SELECTED WORKS, *op. cit.* p. 346.

²⁴ SELECTED WORKS, *op. cit.* p. 346.

²⁵ Karl Marx, "The Future of the British Rule in India", SELECTED WORKS, *op. cit.* p. 356.

corruption could not keep pace with their rapacity? While they prated in Europe about the inviolable sanctity of the national debt, did they not confiscate in India the dividends of the rajahs, who had invested their private savings in the Company's own funds? While they combated the French revolution under the pretext of defending "our holy religion", did they not forbid at the same time Christianity to be propagated in India, and did they not in order to make money out of the pilgrims streaming to the temples of Orissa and Bengal take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple of Juggernaut? These are the men of Property, Order, Family, Religion.²⁶

The latter part of the above passage certainly recalls those passages in Hosea and Amos where they lash out at the immorality practised in the precincts of the temple.²⁷

Passages similar to those cited above can be found in "The Class Struggle in France" where, somewhat reminiscent of Micah, he refers "to the struggle of the people for the necessities of life as against the shameless orgies of the finance aristocracy",²⁸ or again in "The Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association",²⁹ as well as in many of his letters.³⁰ In short, in almost every one of his works one can find Marx denouncing the evils of capitalist society in the blunt language of the Hebrew prophets while holding up the torch of hope to the oppressed masses.

This emphasis on deliverance at a future date is, as was noted above, another one of the prophetic traits found in Marx's work. The predictions of the Hebrew prophets for the most part had to do with the immediate or measurable future, the future that should rise out of the present, although prophecies are found in the prophetic books of the Old Testament which are concerned with the more distant future or the future which

²⁶ Karl Marx, "The Future of the British Rule in India," *SELECTED WORKS*, *op. cit.* p. 357.

²⁷ Amos 2/7; Hosea 4/15; 5/3; 6/10.

²⁸ Karl Marx, "The Class Struggle in France", *SELECTED WORKS*, *op. cit.* p. 143.

²⁹ *SELECTED WORKS*, *op. cit.* p. 379, 381, 382, 383-386.

³⁰ Lewis S. Feuer, (MARX AND ENGELS: BASIC WRITINGS ON POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY) Garden City, New York: A Doubleday Anchor Book, 1959) p. 257.

is not connected by any sequence of events with the prophet's own day. It lies on the far horizon of time and is presented as a distant ray of hope. This distant future is always presented in roseate terms and may broadly be described as the "Golden Age".

Similarly, Marx based the coming rule of the proletariat on the fulfillment of certain historical conditions and at least up until the aftermath of the French Revolution of 1848, his predictions were concerned with the measurable future.³¹ "After the defeats of 1849", Engels tells us, "we looked to a long struggle."³² Although Marx seemed to think that his hopes were about to be fulfilled in the spate of revolutions of 1848, reflection showed him that these hopes were a bit premature. The conditions for the rule of the proletariat had not yet been fulfilled. Apart from his premature analysis of the 1848 revolutions, most of his predictions seem to center around a more distant rather than an immediate future.

That this more distant future is conceived in roseate terms is clear from the introduction Engels wrote to *WAGE, LABOR AND CAPITAL*.

A new social order is possible in which the present class differences will have disappeared and in which... through the planned utilization and extension of the already existing enormous productive forces of all members of society, and with uniform obligation to work, the means for existence, for enjoying life, for the development and employment of all bodily and mental faculties will be available in an equal measure and in ever increasing fullness.³³

For Marx, as we have seen above, the ideal future will develop of itself out of the present. Though men could hasten the process of history, they could not prevent it reaching its ultimate goal. The Hebrew prophets, on the other hand, never supposed that the ideal future they envisioned would develop of itself out of the present, nor by human efforts. The future

³¹ Frederick Engels, "Introduction to the Class Struggle in France," *SELECTED WORKS*, *op. cit.* p. 122.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *SELECTED WORKS*, *op. cit.* p. 78.

they foresaw was the Kingdom of God, in which God's Will would be done universally and in which righteousness would prevail. The similarities between Marx and the prophets with regard to their future orientation end here. For at the very point where the prophets, fully conscious of their mission as heralds of the God of Israel, showed themselves too realistic to expect the fruits of peace from the tree of unrighteousness, Marx's realism and scientific consistency both desert him at once and he eliminates history.

This logical inconsistency in Marx is in some respects due to the prophetic element in his thought. It springs from the victory of the Marxian apocalyptic over the Marxian philosophy. For it is the essence of the apocalyptic to look to the end of history and it will never be content with an endless movement of cyclical change. It seems that this apocalyptic meant more to Marx than all his rational theories, for it was the absolute of his thought, the end of his action. Although we cannot go into this point further here, it might be of interest to compare the Marxian apocalyptic with the Book of Daniel whose author considered the Golden Age, in which God would intervene in history and establish his enduring Kingdom, to be just around the corner.

There is one final point of comparison that can be drawn between Marx and some of the Hebrew prophets. Marx certainly was a revolutionary, eager to free the proletariat from the yoke of oppression. We know that he firmly believed in the ultimate inevitability of the classless society, yet he also believed that men could hasten the process of history. In his own lifetime Marx did everything possible to try to educate the proletariat for its ultimate destiny and to hasten along the overthrow of capitalist society. His manifestos, professions of faith, programs of action, are all aimed at this one goal. For his ideas and the intrigues by which he and his followers sought to implement these ideas, he was expelled in turn from Germany, France and Belgium before finding a permanent even if precarious existence in England.

Marx's revolutionary preoccupations seem to echo the earlier prophets whom we read about in the Books of Samuel and Kings. When the prophets first came into prominence at the time of the establishment of the Monarchy, we find them stirring up national sentiment against the Philistines.³⁴ Later we find Nathan, who had not hesitated to rebuke David for his adultery with Bathsheeba,³⁵ taking a hand in the intrigues against David which helped put Solomon on the throne.³⁶ It was this same prophet, Nathan, who during the reign of Solomon encouraged Jeroboam to lead an unsuccessful revolt.³⁷

After the division of the Kingdom, we find prophets continually taking part in the revolutions which marked the history of the Northern Kingdom.³⁸ Probably the most outstanding instance of this is the story of the overthrow of the house of Omri.³⁹ One even finds a revolution in the neighboring kingdom of Damascus fostered by a prophet.⁴⁰

Among the later prophets of the seventh and eighth century, we no longer find revolutionary intrigue, though their interest in political conditions is still quite marked.

This brings us to the conclusion of our study of the prophetic element in Marx and the influence of this element on his work. Such a study could obviously be elaborated in greater detail, yet I think that from what has been presented above, it is easy to see why Wilson, Berlin, Dawson and others place so much emphasis on Marx's Jewish origins. Unless the tradition from which he sprung is taken into account, it does not seem possible to understand Marx the man of action as he reveals himself to us in his writings nor, for that matter, can we understand how Marx, the philosopher, as soon as he turns to action adopts the naive absolutism of the believer and

³⁴ 1 Samuel 10/5.

³⁵ 1 Samuel 13/1 ff.

³⁶ 1 Kings 1/11 ff.

³⁷ 1 Kings 11/29 ff.

³⁸ 1 Kings 12; 14/14; 16/1; 15/29.

³⁹ 2 Kings 9/1 ff.

⁴⁰ 2 Kings 8/7 ff.

abandons his philosophical preoccupations. The exploitation of the proletariat arouses genuinely moral indignation in Marx. He no longer regards it as a merely necessary phase of economic evolution but as a sin crying out for vengeance. The cause of the proletariat is the cause of social justice in the most absolute sense.

It is here, in Marx the man of action as opposed to Marx the philosopher, that we see the characteristic moral genius of the Jew, to which Wilson refers.⁴¹ This moral genius more than anything else helps to explain why it is that despite the inadequacies of his social and economic theory his work has had such a powerful influence. The three fundamental elements of the Jewish historical attitude, namely, the opposition between the Chosen People and the Gentile world, the inexorable Divine judgment on the latter and the restoration of the former in the Messianic kingdom — all found their corresponding principles in the revolutionary faith of Karl Marx. Thus the bourgeois took the place of the Gentiles and the economic poor took the place of the spiritual poor of the Old Testament, while the Messianic kingdom finds an obvious parallel in the dictatorship of the proletariat which will reign until it has put down all rule and authority and power and in the end will deliver up the kingdom to the classless and stateless society of the future which will be all in all.⁴²

This article has tried to spell out in some detail the prophetic element in Marx's thought by indicating the striking similarities between Marx and the Hebrew prophets. The reader may perhaps decide that these similarities are purely accidental. If so, he is left with the task of explaining how the obviously unscientific and dogmatic socio-economic writings of an oddly isolated figure, totally lacking in eloquence and in the qualities of a great popular leader, could have so powerfully influenced mankind as those of Karl Marx did. Unless we are willing to elevate an economic system to the realm of a cause to be passionately defended, we are compelled to see more in Marx than dialectical materialism.

⁴¹ Wilson, *op. cit.* p. 306-7.

⁴² Christopher Dawson, *RELIGION AND THE MODERN STATE* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), p. 87 ff.