

## Marxist and Christian: MacIntyre and the Postmodern University

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IT IS of more than passing interest that Alasdair MacIntyre has been notably identified in his life with two sharply distinguished ethical perspectives, both on the world in general and on the university in particular. MacIntyre began as a Marxist; he has ended as a Christian.

Forty or fifty years ago it would have seemed highly improbable that any forms of Marxism and Christianity should have found common ground, either in critique or defense of existing culture. Then came liberation theology. Perhaps particularly in Latin America it had a profound impact, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century. While liberation theology gained less of a foothold in Europe and the United States—not least because of the political deterioration of Marxism and the social marginalization of Christianity in Europe—in Britain, Canada, and the United States more recently, especially in intellectual culture, a certain type of Marxist critique of institutions has found allies both among traditional liberals and among more radically (biblically) orthodox Christians. Much of the best of it—one thinks of MacIntyre in *After Virtue* and *Three Rival Versions*—has drawn on Marxism in quite different ways than did the liberation theologians. Although generally marginal to the main drift of Western university culture, a more rigorous and idealistic Marxism and the rigorous Catholicism of Thomistic tradition have come together engagingly in the life and work of the philosopher whose work this volume honors. The result has been mutually reinforcing for both his intellectual and his cultural criticism. In this most recent work, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, we see his synthetic critique emerging in reference to what many others likewise regard as a significant intellectual crisis in Western

universities. For our purposes I will attempt to discuss both the crisis and what I take to be an emerging Marxist/Christian critique for which MacIntyre is a particular exemplar, doing so with reference to the humanities disciplines *other* than theology and philosophy, namely, the case with which I am most familiar, literary studies. But I shall conclude by noting briefly on this model certain possibilities for a more general convergence of Marxist and Christian perspectives that are now developing in “communist” China, not merely as a critique of culture, but in relation to a deeper intellectual fruitfulness of dialogue about the future of humanistic studies. My essay will thus be less a formal analysis of MacIntyre’s book than an appreciation and application of its insights for a related but deeply ailing sector of university culture internationally.

### 1. Intellectual Crisis in the Humanities

Readers of *Nova et Vêtera* are familiar with the now-general criticism from within the American university itself that—as Harry Lewis, former dean at Harvard, and John Sommerville, historian and professor at Florida State University, have variously put it—American universities are now failing to deliver value for money. The perception is not merely that we have become too expensive for the actual cultural and educational contribution we are making.<sup>1</sup> Part of the reason for this deficit, they and many others now argue, is the failure of contemporary university faculties to possess and continue to articulate a coherent sense of cultural mission. This abdication is matched by a worrying degree of anarchic licentiousness and self-serving parochialism in the student body. Summarily, critics are saying that there is too much pursuit of private or coterie agendas, and too little in the way of thoughtful concern for the common good in our university communities. In many disciplines it has become normative for fashionable but narrower agendas—for example, “new-wave” feminism, gender-political advocacy, and environmental criticism—to have displaced large sections of the curriculum; the net effect is a colonization of the intellectual life of the university by competing special interest groups, often at the expense of

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<sup>1</sup> Harry R. Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs, 2006); John C. Sommerville, *The Decline of the Secular University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); also *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk*, ed. Richard H. Hersh and John Merrow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Alvin Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) and his edited volume, *What’s Happened to the Humanities?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); John M. Ellis, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

quality and balanced judgment regarding the health and future development of intellectual culture as a whole.

The relatively inchoate situation in which we find ourselves, I want to suggest, is a result of the devolution of *both* Marxist and Christian thought in Western culture during the second half of the twentieth century. I use the word “devolution” here to suggest that the particular perspectives for cultural formation which once we might have associated with either Marxism or Christianity have, in the more affluent Western countries, eroded or become co-opted (broadly speaking) by vectors of narrower individualistic interest. Notoriously prominent among these overshadowing influences is sexual politics, in which personal sexual freedom comes to be regarded by many as the highest cultural good. Next most often cited is pursuit of a maximization of personal wealth and leisure, often at the expense of the common good for both present and future generations. These insistent claims of the “name it and claim it” economy, absolutely individualistic in character and expression, have in practice trumped more universal social objectives, such as achieving freedom from want (Marx), or freedom from self-centeredness (Christ). It will be evident that such preoccupations as libertarian sexual license, promoted in various modes of entertainment, and the construction of social values based on consumerism rather than common purpose, are inimical both to Marxism and to Christianity as expressed in their original forms. What both Marxism and Christianity have had to offer is opportunity for service in what we might call a “public vision.” (Liberal capitalism, by contrast, has increasingly made its appeal by offering unrestricted opportunities for the fulfillment of private fantasies.) A higher public or communal vision in both cases (though with different degrees of success) has been sustained by the respective convictions of Marxism and Christianity that there is a meaning in history that transcends individual horizons but at the same time gives individuals who share it a higher sense of meaning and purpose.

We do not often enough think of Marxism and Christianity in terms of their common interest in the common good. This is understandable. Marxism, perhaps needless to say, historically has been opposed to religions of all kinds. “Criticism of religion,” Marx asserted in 1844, “is the premise of all criticism.”<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, as a materialist and naturalist philosophy, Marxism has typically found all forms of religion to be incompatible with the mechanisms it has proposed for social progress. Marx’s original point was itself drawn from debate within and among European religious

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 43.

groups; he saw that religious authority, especially the authority of the Bible, had largely been undermined from within both Christian and Jewish reformed traditions after the Enlightenment, and that the ossified state churches functioned to inhibit rather than advance social liberty. Further, he was prophetic, able to see far more clearly than liberal religionists themselves that the European state churches were doomed to increasing ineffectuality as a consequence of this loss of credible authority and transcendence. In this light, his proposal for a kind of radical secularization of society accurately anticipated the inevitable demise of an already rapidly secularizing European Christianity.

The trajectory of development foreseen by Marx has now come to pass with a vengeance, and we should give credit where credit is due. Secularized or “liberal” Christianity, as we may see by the severe decline of mainstream Protestant churches in Europe and the English-speaking countries, has diminished as a constructive social force. In many countries both in Europe and in North America it is now a negligible presence in public consciousness. The history of twentieth-century European and English-speaking culture shows that, once secularized, Christianity no longer effectively critiques culture; it becomes just another aspect of secular culture, or parasitic upon it. As nominally Christian churches and their related institutions lose their distinctive reason for being, they continue to shrink. But Marxism in Europe has also diminished as a vital social force; its own political idealism has dimmed. To some considerable degree this also happened in China after the Cultural Revolution. In these cases, the moral authority of Marxism has likewise been called into question. Is it possible that both liberal Christianity and Marxism are now, at least in the West, “spent forces”? If so, in what respect might this exhaustion provide for instructive reflection among Christian intellectuals in the third millenium?

## 2. Liberal Protestantism and Humanistic Studies

It is useful to recall in particular that, even as Marx was writing, Christian theology had already been marginalized as an authority for intellectual purposes in the university. Subsequently, MacIntyre observes, in many schools not only theology, but philosophy too “became just one more academic discipline.”<sup>3</sup> In Germany, this tendency had already been formalized when, in 1809, Wilhelm Von Humboldt separated theology from the other humanities disciplines in his reorganizing of the Berlin curriculum, greatly impeding thereby the possibility of natural cross-fertilization, and

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<sup>3</sup> *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 135.

especially the probability of a more holistic view of the person as a spiritual as well as material and political being.<sup>4</sup> Von Humboldt's model was widely influential both in Britain and in America. Ironically, once "liberated" in this way from their dialectical relationship with theology, some of the humanities disciplines became, in effect, religion substitutes and began to offer mission justifications expressed in just such terms. This was particularly apparent in the study of vernacular literatures, an academic discipline essentially introduced to the university in the nineteenth century. Similar developments occurred in psychology, sociology, philosophy, and religious studies, in each of which we see an anthropologizing of theological reflection. Part of the argument for each of these disciplines was that in the modern context they replaced the work of an archaic theology, and that the new perspectives were accordingly a contribution to the moral education required by the eclipse of theological authority. As MacIntyre notes, John Henry (Cardinal) Newman understood and opposed these developments as, in effect, a fundamental confusion about the relationship of education to moral development: "It was, on Newman's view, a failure to recognize the difference between genuine morality and this substitute for it that had allowed so many of his contemporaries to believe that education is *the* means to moral development" (148). In England, as later in America with Ralph Waldo Emerson and his successors such as John Dewey, there followed a deliberate acculturation of the disciplines as social programmatic in the service of liberal education theory.

For one highly influential British contemporary of Marx, the inspector of schools and later Professor of Poetry, Matthew Arnold, literary study should ideally replace theology and provide the basis for "modern" secular religion. Arnold, whom Newman clearly had in mind in his remarks, was a classic bourgeois liberal, the first Professor of Poetry at Oxford to lecture exclusively in English (1857), and he is still generally regarded as the father of literary study as a modern university discipline. An advocate for the Established Church, he opposed the religious liberty of dissenting (non-state-authorized) churches, which he asserted would lead to political anarchy (*Culture and Anarchy*, 1869). A "national right reason" required, he thought, replacing every traditional theology and its religious practice with an educated veneration for upper-class, high culture (*Literature and Dogma*, 1873). Though Arnold found biblical language about transcendence to be admirably poetic, he rejected the value of the Bible as a privileged source

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen Prickett, *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 180ff., and his *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), *passim*.

of insight either into the nature of a transcendent God or into human nature, and he denied that in any historical sense the Bible contains truth. Yet, paradoxically, he wished the Bible to be preserved in the curriculum for literary purposes (*God and the Bible*, 1875). It is admittedly fortunate that in some universities, "Bible as Literature" courses are, as he advocated, still taught, for without them much of the canon of English literature would doubtless by now have become unintelligible. The old theological transcendence, however, is largely now invisible, and the "secular scripture" Arnold posited in its place has not retained sufficient cultural authority to achieve anything like the unifying social force Arnold and his many successors had in mind.<sup>5</sup> These successors were nonetheless persistent in continuing this model for literary (or other humanistic) studies until the last quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Neo-Marxism and Literary Studies

The tendency of Western thinkers since Descartes to make the thinking subject (the self) the actual subject of discourse in almost every field,<sup>7</sup> has further facilitated intellectual fragmentation to an extent those who sought for a religion substitute had not, it seems, sufficiently anticipated. Hypertrophy of the humanistic disciplines in such countries as France and the United States has, as is well known, led to a proliferation of sub-specialties (women's studies, gender studies, multi-cultural studies) and has also spawned a re-orientation of mainstream disciplines themselves toward a preoccupation with such issues, each increasingly pursued with the kind of obsessive fervor that one associates with religious enthusiasm. All of this seemed to be quite exciting for a time, and many of the new cultural and social agendas even saw (and advertised) themselves as extensions of Marxist thought. In fact, "neo-Marxist" was a self-descriptive term adopted by many such specialists in what has come to be known as "Cultural Studies." Their praxis was nominally a criticism of hegemonies—

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<sup>5</sup> Northrop Frye, *Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); also, *Rethinking the Future of the University*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey and Dominic Manganiello (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> John A. Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959); also, his *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) offers a detailed account. See also Ann Hartle, *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: A Reply to St. Augustine* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

political, institutional, cultural, and religious. But were they Marxist? If so, theirs was a strange kind of Marxism, one in which “alienation” often became a cultic virtue more than a problem to be overcome, and for which the language of discourse became calculatedly obscure and elitist. The kind of theorizing that such intellectuals have pursued has been far less universal than the project we associate with Marx, and increasingly it has diverted from any synthetic view of a wider global culture. It has tended also to be more focused on the present, less future-oriented. Another way of putting this is to say that while, at their best, post-structuralist movements such as deconstruction, Lacanian analytics, and gender studies have developed some useful critical tools and debating strategies, they have largely failed to develop a sufficiently broad sense of positive intellectual purpose.

In the contemporary Western university, radical individualism and factional social construction tend to be two sides of the same coin: each obviously depends for its ideological appeal on opposition to prevalent or traditional notions of the common good. The resulting contradiction is not always a clash of ideas, but very frequently it has led to intellectual balkanization. An understandable penchant for side-stepping incommensurable conversations (Rorty) in the university context has further tended to erode serious philosophical reflection on everything from intellectual formation and conversation among the disciplines to matters of a rudimentary common curriculum. Unsurprisingly, such factional advocacies have, by the exclusiveness, extremism, and frequent extravagance of their claims, contributed to a palpable loss of authority for the humanities in the university generally.

In English literary studies, for example, there has been a deluge of books and articles over the past decade announcing what Andrew Delbanco has called “The Decline and Fall of English Literature.”<sup>8</sup> For Delbanco, a classic liberal, this means decline from the fuzzy principles of Matthew Arnold, and, in America, from the similarly post-Christian secular individualism of Emerson. The result, Delbanco laments, is that literary study is now “left without a moral center.” This is hardly to be wondered at: the so-called ‘neo-Marxists’—who in reality are more often decadent liberals—typically find the very idea of a “moral center” meaningless and even offensive. Moral rectitude is not a meaningful aspiration for them, because all notions of rectitude, indeed all notions of truth, are for them a species of convenient fiction, merely socially constructed to serve a pursuit of political power. In brief, the idea of a “common good,” along with the fiction

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Delbanco, “The Decline and Fall of Literature,” *The New York Review of Books* (November 4, 1999).

that education provides for moral instruction, is now incoherent precisely to the degree that mind-independent common truths have been judged to be meaningless or “uninteresting.”

#### 4. Truth, Freedom, and Transcendence in the Humanities

The original idea of the university as an intellectual culture in the service of wider culture was based on the Christian premise that many minds should come together to seek truth (Latin *unus* plus *versus*), many minds turning together toward the One.<sup>9</sup> It is no accident that MacIntyre has so much to say on the place of Truth in Aquinas and in the thought of Newman (87–92; 145–47) concerning the work of the university. With the loss of the commonality of purpose the Catholic tradition has in recent decades experienced, it is not surprising in the least that the idea of the university as a place of a communal search for truth has fallen into trouble more generally. This trouble is now highly visible to observers outside the universities, and often, though without much in the way of a deeper conceptual understanding, spectacular instances of what Marilynne Robinson has referred to as “absence of mind” is condemned in the general press.<sup>10</sup> But for our purposes, which require historical perspective on intellectual modernity, it is appropriate to consider the general public criticism in terms of particular and more informed criticism of the discipline which historically has most staked its claim to public approval on providing a non-religiously based social and moral purpose—even a kind of secular transcendence. In the case of English literary studies, we see that perhaps the most trenchant recent critique of “neo-Marxist” postmodernism comes from a principled Marxist, Terry Eagleton. Eagleton’s denunciation is not unique—in fact it has precedents in the alarm of some classic liberal spokesmen such as George Steiner, Andrew Delbanco, and the philosopher Bernard Williams, as well as from a variety of Christians.<sup>11</sup> But Eagleton in particular, a post-

<sup>9</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, in *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), provides a good general discussion of the development of this core idea from the medieval universities through John Henry Newman’s *Idea of the University* and into the late-twentieth-century context.

<sup>10</sup> A recent article, noteworthy in this regard, is Patrick J. Dineen’s “Science and the Decline of the Liberal Arts,” *New Atlantis* 26 (Fall 2009/Winter 2010): 60–68. See Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); also David Lyle Jeffrey, 后理论语境中的文学研究 (“Literary Studies in a Post-theoretical Context”), *Foreign Literatures Quarterly* (Beijing: in Chinese) 108, no. 4 (2007): 30–37.

<sup>11</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); idem, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

Catholic Marxist, is worth paying attention to, I suggest. The failure of literary study following the 1960s to keep in the moral path of socialist reform occasions Eagleton's most stinging rebuke. The turn from literature to cultural theory, he argues, has progressively degenerated into a fashionable, socially endorsed, yet entirely narcissistic self-preoccupation in which, as he puts it, "quietly-spoken middle-class students huddle diligently in libraries, at work on sensationalist subjects like vampirism and eye-gouging, cyborgs and porno[graphic] movies," oblivious to any wider ethical imperative.<sup>12</sup> The idiosyncratic ephemerality of such diversions, once it becomes normalized, not only produces an intellectual crisis because of the loss of logical coherence (for example, blithe abandonment of the principle of non-contradiction)<sup>13</sup> but entails a flight from communal political conscience and public service into radically anarchic self-absorption. That is, the anarchy that Arnold claimed to fear in *Culture and Anarchy* has become a cultural reality, not because some people (for example, Catholics and dissenter evangelicals) have continued to exercise religious liberty, but because so many others followed Arnold in believing that there could be an enduring civic morality without *bona fide* spiritual transcendence. The ineffectuality of Arnold's platitude—its eventual status as meaningless cliché—eventually produced reaction, including anarchic withdrawal from civic morality and social purpose altogether. Without an independent moral truth, why should people not pursue exclusively their subjective desires? Eagleton, in his book *After Theory*, is furious over the palid introspection which has so readily subverted Arnold's high-brow confidence that an enlightened rule of reason would anchor moral purpose in the modern world. "Alienation," in Marxist terms, had become marginalized as an issue, and thus intractable. "The emancipation which had

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1991); Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); see also Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); idem, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*.

<sup>12</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Basic Books, 1983), 2–3; Eagleton can be seen to reflect the criticism of Jürgen Habermas, in the 1981 essay by Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–14; likewise, Eagleton's defense of Christianity against atheism in *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), parallels that of Habermas in *A Time of Transition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 150–51, as well in the latter's affirmative 2006 dialogue with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), published as *The Dialectics of Secularization* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> This is a basic contention of John M. Ellis in his *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

failed in the streets and factories,” Eagleton writes in scorn, “could be acted out instead in erotic intensities or the floating signifier.”<sup>14</sup>

There are consequences to ideas, we like to say, and though some wish not to believe it, eventually there are consequences even in the academic marketplace. It is not surprising, given the decline in student enrollment and in public prestige, that it is common now to speak of “crisis” in literary studies as if it were above all an economic crisis. Clearly it is that, but that only because of a long-standing crisis of intellectual coherence in literary studies as a discipline. Yet, more in response to the reality of shrinking enrollments than to any philosophical deficiency, there has recently been quite a bit of effort to find a more coherent source of general appeal. With various intentions, the virtues of moral purpose, concern for public vision, and convictions about transcendence articulated in the canon of great authors themselves have begun to be leveraged into a revival of interest in the “great books.” In criticism, what Stanley Fish and others have termed a “turn to religion”<sup>15</sup> is a similar response, by Christian and Jewish intellectuals primarily, to an evident flight from the classrooms in literary studies. But this concern is more broadly based, and has involved among philosophers the voice of Eagleton’s sometime intellectual progenitor Jürgen Habermas, a self-professed atheist of Marxist sympathies, who has likewise recently risen to the defense of the Christian intellectual tradition. In his book *A Time of Transition*, he argues that “Christianity, and nothing else, is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights and democracy.” “We continue to nourish ourselves from this source,” he says; “everything else is postmodern chatter.”<sup>16</sup> There is more than a whiff here of reaction to the devolutions effected by pseudo-Marxist postmodern liberalism.

### 5. Christian Critique

Christian criticism of the crisis in the humanities ought to be as pointed as that of a Marxist like Eagleton, even if expressed in less dramatic terms, because a principled Christian cultural critique shares to some considerable

<sup>14</sup> Eagleton, *After Theory*, 29. See also his *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Fish, “One University Under God?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 7, 2005), 1; also “Does Reason Know What It Is Missing?” *The New York Times* (April 13, 2010); also Susan Felch, “A Seminar on Christian Scholarship and the Turn to Religion in Literary Studies,” *Christianity and Literature* 58.2 (2009): 213–303 (see especially the “afterword” by Kevin Hart, 295–301). More recently a book by Andrew Thornton-Norris, *The Spiritual History of English* (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2010), has claimed that, with the disappearance of theological transcendence, there has been a decline in the quality of literary English.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *A Time of Transition*, 150–51.

degree in Marxism's commitment to the common good, as well as its conviction that there is meaning in history. There are, of course, differences. It seems to me that in his essay "Christianity's Dual Meaning in Chinese Modernization," the Chinese philosopher You Xilin has captured something of both the affinity and the difference when he observes:

Christianity thoroughly criticizes secular society when such society does not allow a good person to live in a righteous way. On the other hand, Christianity denies the human being any autonomous moral position and thus it refuses any moral nihilism that results from the disappointment with secular humanity. Thus, faith in God and the perfect example of Jesus' self-devotion inspire individual Christians to uphold moral standards that lead to righteous deeds although he/she may be surrounded by an environment in which crime is prevalent. Consequently, Christianity shows the intrinsic force of its moral values, which challenge the abuses of modernization.<sup>17</sup>

If avatars of the modern Catholic university do not always reach this high standard, essentially the standard as expressed by Aquinas, Newman, and MacIntyre, it is not the clarity of these signal Catholic philosophers on the matter that is to be blamed.

## 6. Idealistic Marxism and Traditional Christianity: A Postscript

It may well be, as You Xilin, Yang Huilin, and other Chinese philosophers have recently suggested, that Marxism has served to bring about modernity in China in a particularly forceful way, but also that, because Marxism is grounded in materialist rather than transcendent presuppositions, it has proved much less effective in forming a critique of modernity at the same time. Canadian philosopher George Grant has observed that Marxism seems in the end to have failed in the West "primarily because it does not allow sufficient freedom to the human spirit,"<sup>18</sup> and insofar as we understand him in that remark as he intended—namely, to be referring to something very much deeper than matters merely political—there seems to be ample warrant for his judgment. This shortcoming has

<sup>17</sup> You Xilin, "Christianity's Dual Meaning in Chinese Modernization," in *Sino-Christian Studies in China*, ed. Yang Huilin and Daniel H. N. Yeung (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 47. For a compatible Western Christian critique, one might consider the movement known as "radical orthodoxy," notably as expressed in works such as *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999); also Stephen D. Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, edited and with introduction by William Christian (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 63.

produced disappointment in many quarters. At the same time that traditional Marxism can still offer telling criticisms of the degraded notion of freedom which now characterizes much of Western postmodern culture, in officially Marxist countries it has run the risk of a less consistent, at worst even permissive, view of the corruptions of civic idealism by personal greed and private ambition.

Nevertheless, we are here on the cusp of the common ground shared by Marxism and Christianity, at least when each is more radically faithful to its origins. It is a ground in some important respects quite alien to the terrain occupied by most nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberal theologians and humanists. In part, the commonality of the prototypes arises from a more closely shared intellectual history and genealogy; as Grant put it, "The ultimate source of Marxist thought was the Judeo-Christian idea of history as the divinely ordained process of man's salvation."<sup>19</sup> The eminent Chinese classical philosopher Liu Xiaofeng, a Marxist and a Christian, in looking at this genealogy a half-century after the revolution of 1949 has shrewdly observed that in China "the translations of Marx's works and Western classical works (on philosophy and literature) introduced the humanistic culture that contained Christian thoughts."<sup>20</sup> Between the medium and this message there has been an unforeseen and creative synergy, now blossoming in many Chinese universities, in which aspects of both Christianity and Marxism are unconsciously but dynamically juxtaposed, creating there for the first time, perhaps, conditions for the emergence of some features elsewhere found only in the earlier Catholic and Christian history of the Western university. In ways that one hopes Alasdair MacIntyre would at least appreciate, if not entirely approve, the movement from idealistic Marxism, through its disappointments, to a renewed search for truth and the common good in the Chinese academic world in some measure mirrors his own personal intellectual development, from a principled earlier Marxist idealism to his mature role as one of the best of contemporary spokesmen for a genuinely Catholic conception of the university. But what his argument and concise resumé of the relationship between theology and the intellectual life of the university make clear, is that no university can remain credibly open to a right relationship between the life of the mind and pursuit of the common good that does not maintain and advance the prominence of theology and theological reflection among the disciplines. Without a credi-

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>20</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context," in *Sino-Christian Studies in China*, ed. Yang Huilin and Daniel H. N. Yeung, 65. See also C. Stephen Evans, "Redeemed Man: The Vision Which Gave Rise to Marxism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 13, no. 2 (1984): 141–50.

ble consideration of transcendence, the search for truth ultimately dissipates into a bad dose of the sentimental vapors. The state of literary study in most Western universities is not the only example of the failure of nineteenth-century disciplines to achieve their promise, but it is a notable one. Efforts to re-invigorate the literary disciplines through the development of programs in "Religion and Literature" mark our awareness of what we have lost, but they cannot hope to redeem the loss, I suggest, without intimate pedagogical access to that perspective on Truth and transcendence which has been the distinctive contribution of Catholic sacramental theology to Western academic culture. N.V