

## PRELIMINARY WORDS

This book, which was written before the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, did not have to be significantly modified in the wake of this event. Marx's relevance will in fact intensify in the future, given his role as the leading critic of capital, particularly as it seeks to position itself as the triumphant locus of global power at the inception of the twenty-first century. Capital's unparalleled fetishistic character is projected even more monstrously as the direct cause of the misery of the largest portion of humanity in the Global South (the so-called Third World). This has been accentuated further, since January 15, 1991, by the war in the Persian Gulf motivated by the battle for control of the world's oil. My hope is that this book can contribute to a distinct rereading of a great nineteenth-century thinker, philosopher, and economist. Contrary to the assertion of the Polish theologian Josef Tischner, Karl Marx not only has not died but will generate new impulses that can infuse the kind of critical thinking that we need today in philosophy, economics, and theology.

Little or nothing has been done elsewhere to address the themes I seek to explore in this book. Although it may seem paradoxical, the questions I focus on here have been persistently bypassed and never explicitly unraveled. Few could imagine that Marx, the great critic of religion, could be repositioned as a thinker who opens a new horizon—for theology.

The case of G. W. F. Hegel, by contrast, has spawned an extensive bibliography. Hegel, like Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Wilhelm

Joseph von Schelling, studied theology; all of them planned to become Lutheran pastors. Later their paths led in other directions, but the imprint of their initial studies was indelible.<sup>1</sup> It is also known that Hegel, when he was a student in Tübingen, because of the kind of theological formation that characterized the evangelical Tübinger Stift,<sup>2</sup> felt the impact of the Pietist theological current that prevailed in the region of Württemberg. In that duchy of Germany, orthodox Lutheranism had been hegemonic. The Pietist movement emerged in opposition, as the product of a profound spiritual and religious renewal, seeking the renovation of Lutheranism from within the church, alongside more sectarian separatist movements that sought to create new religious communities outside of Lutheranism.

From 1733 onward Karl Alexander, a Catholic duke, reigned in Württemberg. His role as an authoritarian member of the military spurred the Pietists to begin to develop a theology opposed to power, to the state, which even led some to characterize him as an Antichrist. This was a theology grounded in the Pietist “People of God”—the poor—whose emphasis was on bringing the “Kingdom of God” to Earth through Pietist praxis. Its point of reference was the ancient traditions of Württemberg, which had been corrupted, according to the Pietist interpretation, both by the orthodox Lutherans and by the Catholic duke. This was a movement that sought to negate the “distant,” abstract God of the Lutherans and the doctrine of *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time just and sinful), which immersed believers in a trap of immobility, as predicated on a sterile spiritual life marked by resignation and fatalism, which also served to justify the domination of Lutheran princes over their impoverished people. The Pietists, by contrast, demanded good works—action and praxis—from their congregations, along with a sense of service, and of political and economic responsibility, which to some degree they had seen put into practice in Geneva by the Calvinists.

This positive dimension of Pietism would lead Hegel, against his initial inspiration, to soon justify the cultural dimensions of capitalism. This would be criticized harshly by Marx. But it must be noted here that Marx explicitly criticized the Puritanism of Dutch or English Protestantism but not the Pietism of Württemberg, to which he was connected to a certain degree.

This is why the German Aufklärung (Enlightenment), with its optimistic vision of history (which in the case of Hegel consisted of the

development of the absolute itself: the *Heilsgeschichte*, or history of salvation) and its affirmation of the goodness of human nature (contrary to the exaggerations of Augustinianism or of orthodox Lutheranism), as in the case of the “free will” of the philosophy of law, appeared to be solely a rationalist movement, that in reality in Germany (but not in France) was a process deeply influenced by the semi-Pelagian position (in the sense that human action dialectically merits the grace of God) of the Pietism of Württemberg.<sup>3</sup>

Pietism thus has a deep influence on the millennialism of Joachim of Fiore (with its utopia consisting of three realms: the realm of the Father of the Old Testament, the realm of the Son of the New Testament, and the realm of the Holy Spirit,<sup>4</sup> which is built through good works, defined by Pietists in terms of *praxis pietatis*).

This also included a historical vision as to the moments when the Antichrist had reigned (from the time of ancient Babel or Rome, which was also criticized by the Apologists, the Alexandrian Fathers, or Saint Augustine but was nonetheless accepted by Eusebius, up until the Catholic Church of Joachim during the twelfth century, or that of the Catholic duchy of Württemberg in the seventeenth century). This amounted in effect to a kind of universal history of key figures of Hell and of the Antichrist. The “people of God,” or community of practicing believers, though they were poor and persecuted, had to struggle against this Antichrist.

It was Philipp Jakob Spener, the founder of German Pietism, who expressed this with the greatest clarity: “the reality of religion consists not of words but of actions.”<sup>5</sup> And J. A. Bengel, the great theologian of Tübingen, asserted that “*Lehre ohne Leben*” (doctrine without life) is not Christian.<sup>6</sup> In essence this meant a demand of *praxis* (it is worth noting in this context that the Book of the Acts of the Apostles was titled *Praxis* in Greek: *Praxis Apostolon*)—of works, and not just of faith—that was tragically passive before the omnipotence of a God of grace. Suffering was understood in relationship to evil, which gave rise to it, and a good Christian should struggle against the suffering of the people in order to vanquish evil.

Let us take an example from Kant, from his work that most influenced the young Hegel and which Marx also encountered in his youth: *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*).<sup>7</sup> Kant says explicitly,

In the face of biblical theology there is a philosophical theology within the field of sciences. . . . This [philosophical] theology, as long as it remains within the bounds of pure reason, and relies for the confirmation and clarification of its theses on history, languages, and the books of all peoples, including the Bible, but only in themselves and not in order to introduce these theses in biblical theology . . . should have the full freedom necessary in order to extend itself as far as science permits.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, this Kantian “philosophical theology” has many positive elements of Christianity mixed within it in its Pietist version. For example, against the pessimism that is characteristic of a certain variant of Lutheran Augustinianism, Kant writes,

The foundation of evil cannot reside in any object that determines free will through an inclination, nor any natural impulse [*Naturtriebe*].<sup>9</sup>

Kant here reaffirms the Pietist (and Catholic) principle that it is not “nature that carries the mark of guilt or merit, but it is instead man himself who is the author of this.” This leads him to affirm the “original disposition toward good in human nature.”<sup>10</sup> In the third part of this work, Kant expounds on the “triumph of the principle of good over that of evil and the foundation of the Kingdom of God over the Earth.”<sup>11</sup> This is the basic Pietist principle during the eighteenth century (and that of the Latin American theology of liberation in the twentieth century, setting aside possible differences).<sup>12</sup> Kant demonstrates that a “civil state of law” is not sufficient in itself,<sup>13</sup> and that instead an “ethical [*ethisch*] civil state” is necessary, which is not limited to the “political community” but to one of an ethical character [*ethischen Gemeinen*]. And this conceptualization of an ethical community is in essence that of a *Volkes Gottes* (people of God) governed by ethical laws.<sup>14</sup> These are, word by word, the aims of the project of the Pietist movement, which are formulated as follows:

An ethical community governed by a divine moral legislation is a church that, to the extent that it is not an object of possible experience, can be described as an invisible church.<sup>15</sup> . . . That which is visible consists of the effective union of men in an all-embracing unity that is in concordance with that ideal.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to underline that Marx will begin his successive stages of writing *Das Kapital* (*Capital*) with an attentive reading of

Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (*Science of Logic*). Hegel had written to a friend that the “only science is theodicy.”<sup>17</sup> In his *Logik* this becomes the generative thesis of the book as a whole. Thus, at the beginning of this work, which is central in all of Hegelian thought, Hegel writes that “this content is the presentation of God in his eternal essence before the creation of nature, and of a finite spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

Karl Löwith himself wrote that “Hegel’s logic is an ontology, at the same time as a theology—an ontotheology.”<sup>19</sup> What was for Hegel in his *Logik* the “development” of God as such, not surprisingly, applying the same logic to capital, produces the “development” in Marx’s work of the Antichrist, of Moloch, of the fetish.

As I have noted previously, the variant of Protestantism that prevailed in the Rhineland and thus in the region of Trier, where Marx was born, also reflected the influence of Pietism.<sup>20</sup> Marx would experience this in his high school classes, as well as later in the Hegelian environments of Berlin through the prevailing currents that were then dominant in philosophical circles. Schelling, Hölderlin, and many others of the same generation were also marked by Pietism. German idealism and the *Aufklärung* should be situated within this tradition.

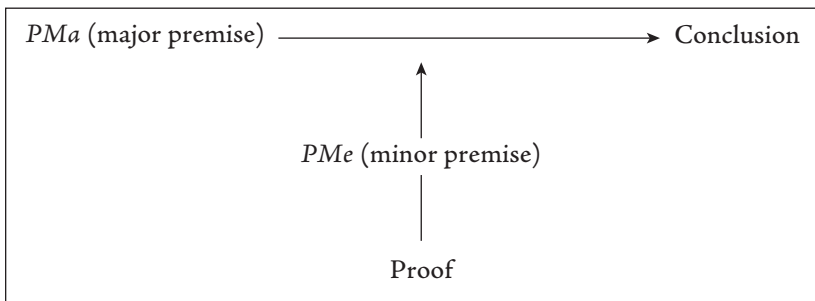
Despite the importance of this context, Marx’s philosophical, ethical, anthropological, and historical positions have not been “read” in relation to the theological problems posed during this era. If this were to be done, it would then be clearly revealed that Marx provides his own solution to these theological problems, as I will explore in detail in part II of this book. This will in turn render it less surprising that I have found theological positions embedded in Marx’s thought.

In any case, I am convinced that Marx derived his framing of the issue of the Antichrist from German Pietism, as well as its prioritization of praxis. And just as the Pietists were opposed to a Catholic king, and Hegel to a (Prussian German) king without a constitution, Marx would first oppose the Lutheran state (during his period of political critique as a journalist in Germany), and later launch his philosophical-economic critique directed at capital itself, beginning in 1843 in Paris, then in Brussels, and definitively in London, in theoretical and systemic terms, after 1857.

In Marx’s work there is an implicit strategic structure of argumentation that must be made explicit. In diagram P.I, I will frame this as suggested by Stephen Toulmin.<sup>21</sup>

Marx’s framework of argument is as follows:

DIAGRAM P.I. Toulmin's overview of Marx's structure of argumentation.



1. Major premise (*PMa*): If a Christian is a capitalist
2. Minor premise (*PMe*): And if capital is the Beast of the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation—the “visible demon”<sup>22</sup>
3. Conclusion: This Christian finds himself in a state of practical contradiction.

All of this will demand proof, which I will seek to provide throughout this book. But in order for this argument to be understood, certain definitions must be stated from the beginning.

The “Christianity” of the Christian who is alluded to in *PMa* is that which is really existent in daily life, and which has a Lutheran or Puritan character in Europe during Marx’s era—or today in the European, North American, and Latin American capitalist world. This “capitalism” is also that which is understood by all in their daily lives, with its free-market character during Marx’s period, and that which prevails at the end of the twentieth century, which in terms of the essential relationship between labor and capital is abstractly or essentially the same. The *PMe* will demand additional considerations, which will be explored in parts I and II of this book.

If it is accepted (for now, without demonstration) that capital is “Moloch,” the “fetish,” the “visible demon,” as a further elaboration of the doctrine of the “Antichrist” in Joachimite Pietism,<sup>23</sup> then a Christian would find himself in a clearly contradictory position, because their daily praxis within the capitalist system would ethically involve a satanic, demonical action.

If this were so, this Christian could elude this contradiction in one of the following four ways: (1) by affirming their Christianity and renouncing their capitalist praxis (which is what Marx strived for); (2) by

affirming capitalism and renouncing Christianity (which happened and happens rarely); (3) by inventing a fetishistic religion, labeled Christian, but modified in such a way that it was no longer in contradiction with capitalism, as reflected in examples such as Dutch or English Puritanism, generating the kind of religious attitude that capitalism needs so that it can be reproduced in “good conscience”;<sup>24</sup> or, finally, (4) by interpreting capitalism in such a way that it no longer appears contradictory to the most authentic and prophetic forms of Christianity, which is the function of the version of capitalist political economy developed by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus, and others and serves to conceal the unethical essence of capitalism.

The first and second options have no need of any critique, because they resolve the contradiction objectively. The third option, in contrast, where it exists, would in Marx’s terms demand a critique of fetishistic religion. Marx did not develop this fully but instead left us many suggestive components. It was this option that many within the Marxist tradition, and among his critics, understood to be simply a critique of religion as such.<sup>25</sup> I should underline here that this critique of fetishistic religion is perfectly acceptable to an authentic, prophetic Christian consciousness oriented toward liberation. Chapter 6 of this book, “Marx’s Atheism and That of the Prophets of Israel,” explores this in terms of the nonfetishistic dimensions of Marx’s critique of the religion of domination.

Appendix 2, “Religion as a Justification of Domination and Liberation,” also offers material relevant to these issues. Marx could have affirmed, with Saint Justin Martyr, who wrote in the second century against the groups that were hegemonic in the Roman Empire,

This is why some refer to us as atheists [*átheoi*]. If it is those [Roman] gods they speak of, we must confess that we are indeed atheists [*átheoi éinai*].<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the fourth option, Marx explores it in detail throughout his work, but principally in *Capital*, with an emphasis on the structural factors that impede a Christian escape from the contradiction highlighted above. His emphasis is on demonstrating how capital is created through the accumulation of surplus value, and that surplus value is the objectification of unpaid labor, which makes it impossible for capital’s unethical character to be concealed within a critical systemic vision.

But on the other hand, in developing this argument, Marx demonstrates that capital seeks to conceal this unethical status through the

pretension of “creating profit from itself,” “from nothing.” This pretension is interpreted by Marx now as fetishistic. The fetishistic character of capital is the other side of the coin of the ideological political-economic interpretation of the unethical essence of capital: the affirmation of capital as an *absolute*. The critique of the fetishistic character of capital is, epistemologically, in fact, a philosophical-economic task (which is the theme in part I of this book).

Now let’s turn our attention to the central theme of this book. The argument, like all arguments, unfolds on the basis of the minor premise (*PME*), “if capital is the Antichrist, the visible demon.” This statement could sound in bad taste, as if it involves twisting Marx’s discourse in a discordant and even ridiculous way that is ultimately very distant from Marx. Nonetheless, my aim here is to demonstrate that this approach is in fact deeply grounded in his thinking (which will be the theme of part II of this book). In effect, the Christian is not in conflict with himself, neither solely nor principally because of the fetishistic character of capital, from a philosophical or economic perspective (which I will develop in part I).

I must clarify here that this matter has not yet been explicitly enunciated in a way that is understandable from the perspective of “language games” or of proper Christian terminology. Despite this Marx develops this argument continuously, but in a metaphorical manner—the theme of chapters 4 and 5—by referring to capital with predicates or determinations related to “fetishism,” the “demon,”<sup>27</sup> the “beast” of the Apocalypse, or other related expressions (Moloch, Mammon, Baal, etc.). These “metaphorical” references—if they are taken seriously, in a systematic way—produce, as a result, a discourse that is parallel to Marx’s central philosophical-economic discourse.

I will denominate this as a parallel metaphorical discourse: Marx’s “metaphorical” theology. This theme has never been taken seriously, and at least for this reason, I think it is worthwhile to take the risk implied in launching this hypothesis. It must be taken into account here that a metaphor, or a symbol, does not produce new philosophical-economic knowledge but “opens” a new world—as Paul Ricoeur would say, and more concretely in this context what it “opens” is a new theological horizon.<sup>28</sup>

If what were involved were simply loose metaphors that were chaotic or purely fragmentary, we could only say that Marx’s work includes theological metaphors. But if these metaphors reflect a distinct logic, then we can speak of a prototheology or of a theology that is implicit. Marx did not have the intention of producing a theology that was formally



explicit—this must be clear up front. He was not, in the strict sense of the term, a theologian. What he did do is open the horizon for a new theology, which is something quite different.

Let us take as an example the following, which may serve to cause the reader to suspect that the hermeneutics of these metaphors is frequently characterized by many problems of interpretation. In the *Grundrisse*, speaking of money, Marx notes,

[Money,] in its configuration as a serf [*Knechtsgestalt*], when it presents itself as a simple medium of circulation, suddenly becomes the sovereign and God of the world of commodities.<sup>29</sup>

Marx is referring here to the text by Saint Paul (Phil. 2:6–7). But the Marxist tradition will not take this into account, in its ignorance, and those in the anti-Marxist school will also ignore it because of their bias toward the idea that Marx was antireligious:

He, despite his divine figure [*Gestalt Gottes*], was not wedded to his classification as a God; to the contrary, he alienated himself and took on the appearance of a slave [*Knechtsgestalt*].<sup>30</sup>

We can see here how Marx draws on the text of the New Testament in a very subtle and knowledgeable way. He describes money in effect as the “inversion” of Christ, as an Antichrist. Just as Christ represented a “divine figure” that alienated himself by assuming the “figure of a slave,” money (in the opposite direction) transformed itself from its “figure of a slave” into a “god” (the fetish). Christ humiliated himself downward, while money rises and becomes divine in what is clearly an inversion.

Marx’s metaphorical manner of employing biblical and theological themes compels an attentive, oblique reading, which demands dual dimensions of competence—philosophical-economic and theological—that never coexisted, either among Marxists or those anti-Marxists who were prejudiced a priori against Marx. Only a careful, open reading that has the capacity to reveal the logic alongside Marx’s philosophical-economic discourse could conjure this interpretative hypothesis.

It is for this reason that it must be understood clearly that it is not the same to approach the fetishistic character of capital from the perspective of a philosophical and economic-political discourse (part I of this book), as it is to do so through the development of a “metaphorical,” symbolic discourse with an implicitly theological meaning (part II). This is a theology, which is implicit, negative, “metaphorical,” and fragmentary.

At the beginning of a new (second) century following the death of Marx in 1883, and following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and of the deep crisis of “really existing socialism,” studies regarding Marx must take on a new physiognomy directed at a frontal critique of a capitalism that looks triumphant. And yet 75 percent of global capitalism, in the Global South, cries out with pain amid a process of increasing irremediable impoverishment within the framework of a free-market economy with uncontrolled prices of impoverishment that cannot be resolved within an economy based on free-market prices. All of this, in reality, conceals a necrophilia which is at its core. Marx is the greatest of the theoretical critics of capitalism, including his theological “metaphors,” and this opens a new dimension in the understanding of his work, which I believe will have profound relevance in the near future.

This book also concludes my overall rereading of Marx’s work, which has taken many years,<sup>31</sup> and which has prepared me to “deploy” his thinking critically against the evanescent fashions of fetishism—philosophical, economic, political, or religious (including religion of Catholic origin)—which are characteristic of the closing decade of the twentieth century. Against those who prophesy the “end of history” through the triumph of capitalism,<sup>32</sup> Marx rises up against Friedrich Nietzsche when he writes,

Nihilism, as a symptom of this, indicates that the disinherited no longer have any consolation, that they destroy in order to be destroyed: that, stripped of any morality, they no longer have any reason to surrender, that they are rooted in the terrain of the opposite principle and want Power for themselves, thereby obliging the powerful to be their executioners.<sup>33</sup>

This is why Marx never said “God is Dead.” Instead he affirmed that capital is an emphatically living “god” that demands human victims. Given the gigantic debt borne by the Global South (with the “interest” paid to the Global North), Marx’s anti-Nietzschean text emphasizes how “god” (the fetish) lives off the life of the world’s poor:

The total thingification, inversion, and absurdity [is] that of capital as capital . . . , which renders compound interest, and takes on the appearance of a kind of Moloch that demands the world as a whole as its victim, offered in sacrifice [*Opfer*] on its altars.<sup>34</sup>

In this text we have a “full-bodied” Marx who gives expression to a “metaphorical” religious discourse, or to a theological “metaphor”—however we might prefer to characterize it. And this is not the young Marx, but one captured at the latter stage of his work, during his writing of *Capital*, as I will explain in greater detail in section 3.2 of chapter 3 in this book.

If this book were written by a psychoanalyst, it could have been titled *Marx’s Religious Unconscious*, which is to say that this unconscious has an important religious component, which was censored by his *superego*. As a result, it could only be filtered through metaphors. In any case, these metaphors are present in Marx’s explicit discourse and can be analyzed.

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