



CASTRO LINKS MARXISM WITH CHRISTIANITY

BY

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WHEN a Marxist says there are more things in common between Marxism and Christianity than between capitalism and Christianity, the natural reaction is that the proponent of this theory has gone out of his head.

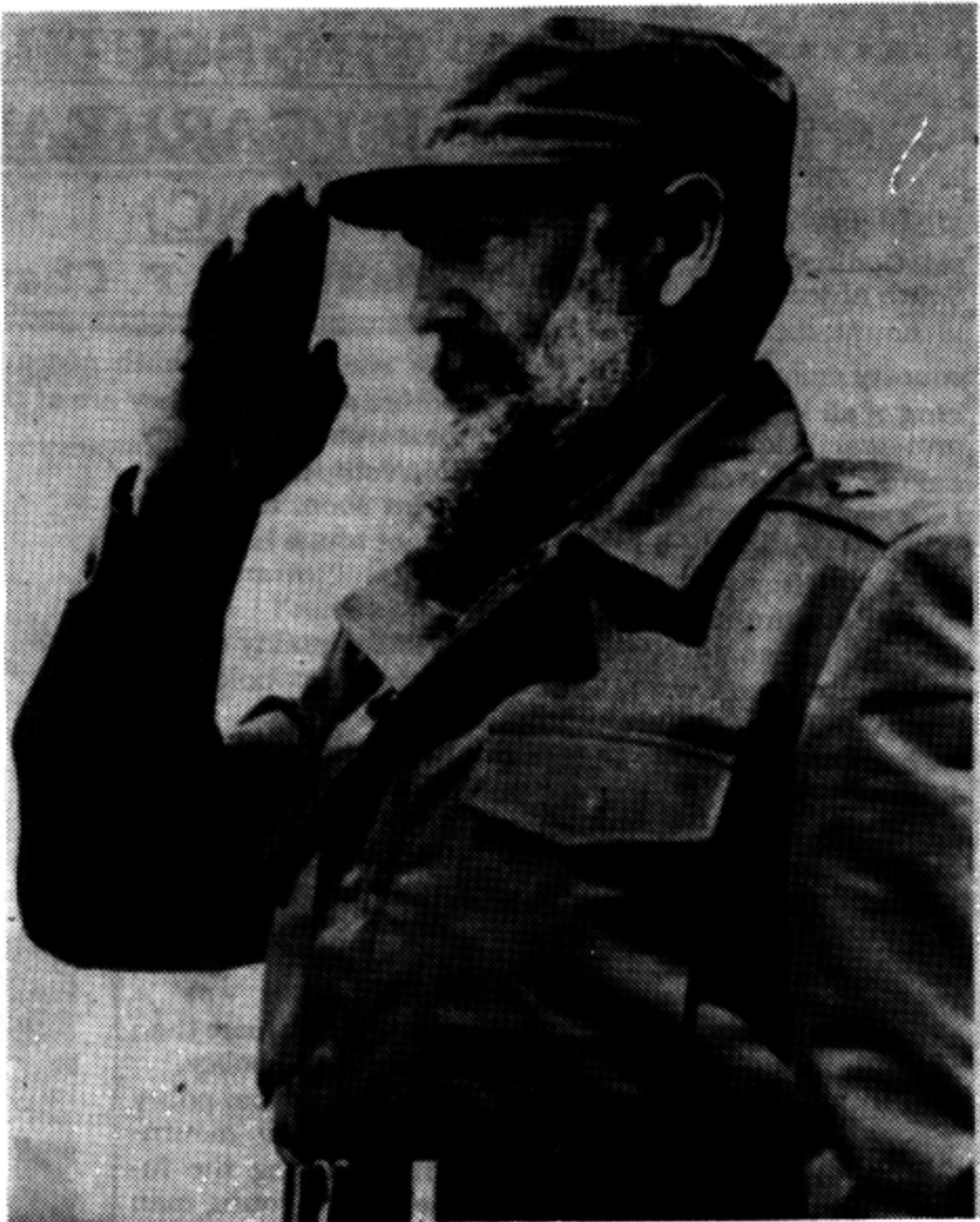
If the proponent of the theory is none other than the Cuban President, Fidel Castro, you would say:

»Ah, I knew nobody can propound such a theory other than the man who knows nothing about Christianity.»

But if this theory is supported by a highly educated Catholic priest, you will begin to listen and put aside all your prejudices.

For about 26 years, the West has been painting a wrong picture about Cde Fidel Castro. The fact that he is a Christian and has helped repair many church buildings in Cuba has been ignored.

A 353-page book entitled Fidel and religion, removes the veils of suspicion, ignorance and prejudice.



It is written by a Brazilian Dominican friar, Frei Betto, who spoke with Cde Castro for 23 hours about religion and other topics.

Castro, however, admits that Marxists have at times been dogmatic »But you (Christians) are dogmatic too, and sometimes you have more dogmatic than we have been.

The Cuban leader says he told Catholic bishops who went to hold talks with him in Cuba that the church had been inflexible on many occasions.

»I also told them that revolutions had sometimes been inflexible but

that no other institution in history has been more rigid or inflexible than the Catholic Church, » says Castro.

That rigidity, inflexibility and intolerance had led, over the centuries, to the creation of institutions with the ideas such as burning people at the stake for holding dissident views against the church.

Scientists and thinkers had been burned alive for disagreeing with the church.

I told them (American bishops) there were things in common, that we could follow almost all God's commandments



perfectly, that they were very similar to ours.

»The church says, »Thou shalt not steal» and we apply that principle rigorously,» he says.

One of the tenets of the Cuban revolution is to prevent theft, embezzlement and corruption

»The church says, »Love thy neighbour as thyself». This is exactly what we preach through feelings of human solidarity, which is the essence of socialism and communism, the spirit of fraternity among men, which is one of the most valued goals.

»The church says »Thou shalt not bear false witness». Well, lying and deceit are among the things that we most severely criticise and censure,» Cde Castro says.

One of the ethical elements of relations among the Marxist revolutionaries was the principle of respect for a comrade's wife.

This tied very well with the Christian commandment of »Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.»

»When for example the church fosters the spirit of self sacrifice and the spirit of austerity and when the church urges humility, we have exactly the same thing it is a revolutionary's duty to be self-sacrificing and live modestly and austere,» adds Cde Castro.

Frei Betto says he likes St Theresa of the infant Jesus's definition, which

was that humility was commitment to the truth.

The priest, agreeing with Cde Castro says it seems the Marxists also observe another important commandment: »Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.»

»Reagan and many capitalist governments do precisely that, invoking His name in vain. I prefer fair policies applied in the name of human principles and ideology: colonialists, imperialist fascist policies are often applied in the name of God.»

What reassures the friar is the biblical awareness of the fact that idolatry exists in religious phenomena — that is many people believe in gods, and in general, it is not Jesus.

»I am convinced for example — I have often wondered about this — that there isn't any similarity between God in whom the Latin-American workers and farmers and I believe and God of Reagan and the murderous Chilean generals, such as Pinochet.

»They don't appear to be the same: they are different concepts, and one of those concepts is nothing but idolatry. The evangelical criterion for defining that concept isn't idolatry, it is the commitment to love thy neighbour — and above all, the poor,» says Betto.

Betto denies the god whom Marxist-Leninists deny: the god of capital, the god

of exploitation, the god in whose name the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries slaughtered the Indians: the god who justified and sanctified the ties between the church and the bourgeois state: the god who legitimises military dictatorship.

While the Christians can pride themselves in having sent missionaries to the Amazon, for example to live in the Indian communities or to work with lepers the sick in many parts of the world, Cuba has its own internationalist workers.

Thousands of Cubans are on internationalist missions. For example 2,000 teachers went to Nicaragua and shared the very difficult conditions of the Nicaraguan farmers.

An interesting aspect of this was that nearly half of the Cuban teachers who went to Nicaragua were women, many of them with families and children.

They left their families for two years to go to the remotest, most out-of-the-way places in the mountains and rural areas of Nicaragua, to live where their students lived, in thatched huts, and eat what they ate.

There are 1,500 doctors working in isolated places in Asia and Africa.

Castro makes many references where Cubans are performing the functions of missionaries.

There is much Christians can learn from the Cuban leader's brand of politics and religion.

After all, he is a Christian who was baptised in the Catholic Church in Cuba at the age of seven.