
MARXISM AND CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL MILIEU IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

P E T R M A C E K

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to analyse a discussion on Marxism among Czech interwar Catholic authors. For this purpose, it follows two separate yet interacting discourses. Firstly, it examines a critique of Marxism in Christian sociology. Here, it pays attention to the most important authors of this era – Alois Soldát, František Reyl and Bedřich Vašek. Our reading of their sociological syntheses suggests that their aim was not a mere refutation of Marxism but rather an attempt to seriously engage with multifaceted legacy of Marx's thought. While they generally appreciated the depth of Marx's analysis, the Czech Christian sociologists tended to be critical to the common foundations of modern secularized ideologies. In that regard, their critique was not aimed only at Marxism but also on classical liberalism, that was perceived as a natural precursor of Marxism. Second half of the paper is devoted to the commentaries on Marxism published in the Czech Catholic periodical. Here we might find rather less nuanced reading of Marxism with tendency for unequivocal rejection of Marxism, which was predominantly seen as a reductive philosophical system based on a nihilistic presupposition and essentially inimical to the idea of human personal dignity and freedom. The second part of the paper is focused on the work of Jaroslav Durych and Rudolf Ina Malý.

Keywords

Catholicism; Marxism; Czechoslovakia; 1920s–1930s; Christian sociology; Political philosophy and theology

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In 1937, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* refuting the political and social system of Communism. While focusing on current political challenges brought about by revolutions and civil

wars in Soviet Union, Spain and Mexico, it also offered a more systematic analysis of Marxist doctrine.¹ Here, the Marxist and Catholic perspective were depicted as clearly opposing poles in all philosophical and political debates.² The main aim of the paper is to offer more nuanced view on the relations of Catholics authors towards Marxism. Its focus is on the interwar debate in Czech Catholicism, the time which saw on one hand a sincere Catholic intellectual and spiritual renewal and on the other hand an explosion of secular ideological narratives competing with the religious worldview. In the Catholic milieu, this situation provoked complex and dense discussion, analysis of which will be the main subject of the paper. It will follow two main lines of reasoning. Firstly, it will analyse an academic discourse in Christian sociology which strove to offer rather balanced and unbiased view on Marxism. Then it will continue with the depiction of a more ardent and subjective discussion in the Catholic periodicals of the time. The analysis will lead to the description of a multi-layered debate, which suggests how demanding and at times disorienting it was for Catholic intellectuals to cope not only with Marxism but with demands of modern ideologies in general.

The paper follows, in many ways, on previous research on the intellectual history of Czech Catholicism, represented in the field of historical sociology by the work of Zdeněk R. Nešpor³ and in the field of history of literature by the massive synthesis of Martin C. Putna.⁴ Our analysis complements these studies with focus on the theoretical deconstruction of Marxism in Catholic thought, which was mainly missing in previous research. In their probes into the Czech Christian sociology, both Nešpor and Putna focus on the phenomenon of religion and the struggle of Catholicism with modern secularity rather than on economic or social issues connected with Marxism. Other studies on Catholic social teaching were devoted to the more practical aspects of its adoption in the Czechoslovakian Catholicism and its implications

¹ For the analysis of Marxist doctrine, cf. Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 7–18.

² For the exposition of this argument, see the first part of Philippe Chenaux, *L'Église catholique et le communisme en Europe (1917–1989), de Lénine à Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 2009).

³ Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje intelektuálů: vývoj české sociologie náboženství v mezinárodním a interdisciplinárním kontextu* (Praha: Scriptorium, 2008)

⁴ Martin C. Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v kontextech: 1918–1945* (Praha: Torst, 2010).

for political life.⁵ The aim of our paper is therefore to fill in the lacuna in the contemporary research.

Methodologically, the paper is based on the analysis of primary texts on Marxism produced by Czech Catholic intellectuals. In the case of Catholic sociologists, it mainly comprises their comprehensive sociological textbooks. The paper analyses the work of the main representatives of Christian sociology in interwar Czechoslovakia, the professors of this discipline on the faculties of theology in Prague and Olomouc. Representative collection of articles and collection of essays was chosen for the treatise of Catholic journalism. It focuses on the most distinctive journalists and authors (Jaroslav Durych, Rudolf Ina Malý), who preoccupied themselves with Marxism not only through political pamphlets but on a more substantial level of theoretical analysis.

1. Sociological perspective

Already in the decades preceding the outbreak of the First world War, the Catholic church in the Czech lands, in that time still under the rule of Habsburgs, saw the birth and rise of the political Catholicism, represented on the right wing of the political spectrum by the National Catholic Party in the Kingdom of Bohemia and on the left wing by emergence of Catholic socialism and the Christian Social Party in Bohemia.⁶ This complex and multifaceted political movement was inspired and influence partly by the rise of modern political ideologies and differentiation of the political spectrum in the Czech lands, partly by the challenges of modernization, industrialization and workers' movement and to a great extent by the formation of Catholic social teaching initiated by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

All these profound changes in the relations between the Church and modern society required thorough theoretical study, which would manage to offer systematic analysis of the process of modernization, but in the same time would be rooted in the foundational principles

⁵ Pavel Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové: příspěvek k problematice programových a organizačních základů českého politického katolicismu v letech 1894–1938* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2011); Jakub Štofáník, *Medzi križom a kladivom: recepcia sociálneho myslenia v katolíckej cirkvi v prvej polovici 20. storočia* (Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2017).

⁶ Pavel Marek, 'Počátky českého politického katolicismu v letech 1848–1918,' in *Český politický katolicismus 1848–2005*, eds. Petr Fiala et al. (Brno: CDK, 2008): 23–126.

of Christian faith. Thus, we can observe the establishment of new academic discipline, in that time referred to as ‘Christian sociology’ aspiring to offer sociological description of the structure and development of modern society seen through the perspective of the Catholic social teaching. Prevailing methodological conviction of the time strove to construct Christian sociology as strictly scientific field of study, which should be able to provide objective, scientific outlook of the society.⁷ Supernatural horizon of the faith was perceived more as an ‘additional’ layer, whose aim was to confirm results reached by natural reason.⁸ However disputable this ostensible objectivity might be, Christian sociology still managed to create an impressive synthesis of the sociological knowledge.

The general history of the Christian sociology in the Czech lands and the profiles of its leading experts have already been the subject of many studies.⁹ Therefore, the main aim of this paper is not to offer yet another general overview of the development of the Catholic social teaching in the Czech land, but rather to focus on narrowly defined question of the reception of Marxism among the Czech Christian sociologists. In the following part of the paper, the Catholic analysis of Marxism will be based on the work of the leading Christian sociologists – Alois Soldát (1862–1952), František Reyl (1865–1935) and Bedřich Vašek (1882–1959).¹⁰ While Soldát and Reyl published their sociological syntheses in the time before the war and it was in the strict sense only Bedřich Vašek, who can be considered as an author of the inter-war period, all of them influenced intellectual milieu of the Czech Catholicism after the creation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. Therefore, I will briefly describe main outlines of their critique of Marxism and then I will focus on common threads in their analysis.

⁷ Bedřich Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie. Díl I, Život sociální* (Praha: Universum, 1933), preface, without page numbers.

⁸ For the discussion on the relation between natural and supernatural in the Catholic social thought, cf. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edition (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 206–256.

⁹ Cf. Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje intelektuálů*, Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové*, Libor Ovečka, *‘Člověče, bylo ti oznámeno, co je dobré...’ Česká katolická morální teologie 1884–1948* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011), Štofáník, *Medzi křížom a kladivom*.

¹⁰ Only the life and work of František Reyl was a subject of a monograph, cf. Matěj Havel, *František Reyl, kněz, vědec, politik* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2016). For short biographies of other authors, cf. Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové* and for the overall assessment of their work cf. Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje*, 100–110.

Alois Soldát, who had been a full professor of Christian sociology at the Theological faculty of Charles University in Prague since 1907, published his *opus magnum*, a thorough overview of Christian sociology titled *Nástin základův a všeobecných zásad společensko-hospodářských* [*The Outline of the Socio-Economic Foundations and General Principles*] in 1913.¹¹ As the title suggests, the book follows both economic and sociological study of society. It proceeds from the principles of political economy and after that, it offers explanation of basic social structures (with focus on family, state and private property). Obviously, the emphasis on the political economy leads Soldát to the exposition of Marxism, which is conceptualized precisely as a system of political economy, rather than political ideology or even philosophical system. Soldát opens his critique of Marxism with the dispute over Marx's value theory. Soldát, in accordance with other Christian sociologists of the era, appreciates sophistication of Marx's analysis but points out that the value of commodities cannot be determined only by the average quantity of human labour necessary to produce a commodity, but also by other factors like the value of engines, land, real estate and capital itself. Soldát argues that Marx's theory of value was more an instrumental tool to awaken class consciousness of proletariat, than rigorous analytical framework.¹² In the typical line of argument, he tries to prove that Marx is able to come up with valuable observation about social life, but his conclusions are radically reductive. One of the main aims of the Christian sociology was thus to amend what was perceived as too simplistic character of all modern ideologies and offer a fuller notion of social reality. Soldát therefore concludes, that main weakness of Marx's approach is led by 'immeasurable exaggeration, arbitrary generalizations and by drawing incorrect conclusions'.¹³ Marx's writing has more of a rhetorical quality, than an objective scientific value. Consequently, 'socialism does not arise from a scientific view of reality, but from the resentment, the indignation of the working class'.¹⁴

¹¹ Alois Soldát, *Nástin základův a všeobecných zásad společensko-hospodářských, příspěvek katolické mravouky k řešení otázky sociální* (Praha: Dědictví sv. Prokopa, 1913).

¹² Soldát, *Nástin*, 23, 161, similar argument might be found in Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie*, 126.

¹³ Soldát, *Nástin*, 162.

¹⁴ Soldát, *Nástin*, 165.

Only one year after Soldát's synthesis of Christian sociology, František Reyl, at that time professor of sociology at the diocesan seminary in Hradec Králové, published his own treatise *Jádro křesťanské sociologie* [*The Core of Christian Sociology*]. The original publication was revised and reissued in 1924 as *Sociologie v politice* [*Sociology in Politics*].¹⁵ In the following presentation of Reyl's arguments, I will mostly refer to updated version from 1920's as it better reflects on the discussions in the interwar Catholicism. Unlike Soldát, Reyl did not proceed from the exposition of political economy, but firstly paid attention to the historical development of sociological thinking. His main point of reference is the differentiation between evolutionism in sociology and Christian principles of social thought. Also in his other texts, Reyl strove to show that Christianity and specifically the Catholic church were not adversaries of science and scientific development, but contributed to the scientific progress and education, for instance through the foundation of universities and other important centres of learning.¹⁶ Ironically, it is not pure immanentism and positivism of modern sociology, but rather its Christian counterpart, that is better suited to explain the dynamism of modernization and all paradoxical tension in the relations between individual and society. In this context, Reyl exposed Marxism not as a unique and independent theory, but rather as an organic part of the development of modern scientific paradigms. He ranked it, maybe a little bit surprisingly, among 'biological or organic course' in sociology. Presumably he wanted not only to illustrate materialistic background of Marxism, but also point out its closeness to Darwinism – he spoke about Darwin just few pages before Marx – and its adherence to all the limits and potentially poisonous consequences of Darwin's thought, when it is applied to the social thinking.¹⁷

Reyl thus emphasises reductionism of Marx's materialism, that underestimates the importance of individuality for social life. It is important to note, that the significance of personal and individual human being was, for Reyl, one of the foundational principles of all social being. He designates human individuality as the main source of social development and devotes a substantial part of his book to the

¹⁵ František Reyl, *Jádro křesťanské sociologie* (Hradec Králové: Politické družstvo tiskové, 1914), František Reyl, *Sociologie v politice* (Praha: Česká akciová tiskárna, 1924).

¹⁶ František Reyl, 'Církev pronásleduje vědu,' *Časové úvahy* 4, no. 8 (1900): 15, cited in: Havel, *František Reyl*, 139.

¹⁷ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 44–53.

explanation of the role of individuality in social life.¹⁸ For these reasons, when talking about Marxism, he underlines, how its impersonal materialism leads to a mechanical vision of society. In the final parts of the books, Reyl recapitulates history of the First International, whose sixtieth anniversary fell on the year of the book's publication in 1924, and concludes that materialistic socialism is able to provide limited material benefits but deprives workers of any spiritual aspects of life. Ultimately, it means that not only workers, but humanity as such cannot develop spiritual gifts that form the essence of life. Marxism 'did not benefit the individual and severely damaged social solidarity with its hateful class struggle.'¹⁹

The last major contribution to the Christian sociology came from Bedřich Vašek, a professor of the Christian sociology at the Faculty of Theology at the Palacký University in Olomouc.²⁰ Like Soldát and Reyl, Vašek compiled comprehensive sociological synthesis – *Křesťanská sociologie* [*Christian Sociology*] published in three volumes between 1929–1933.²¹ Vašek paid attention to the social problems and challenges of his time not only in his scholarly treatises, but also in his essays on the life of man in modern, industrialized society. For instance, in the collection of short texts from 1919, he defines workers' movement as one of the new political religions that emerged as a result of secularization. He acknowledges dismal conditions of workers' lives – monotony, strains and lack of joy from work along with deep family problems and poor housing situation.²² His interest in social problems thus stemmed from deep concerns about real situation of workers. And from these concerns probably originate certain appreciation of Marx's observation, which might be found in his analysis of Marxism.

In the volume II of his *Christian Sociology*, Vašek notes: 'In his critique of capitalism, Marx was a genius: what he wrote about capitalism was extraordinary.'²³ In his 'perspicacity', Marx was able to accurately

¹⁸ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 79–81.

¹⁹ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 384.

²⁰ Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové*, 321–323; Putna, *Česká katolická literatura 1948–1945*, 812–813.

²¹ Bedřich Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* (Praha : Československá akciová tiskárna, Universum, 1929–1933), Vol. I *Život sociální*, [*Social Life*]; Vol. II *Spravedlnost v životě hospodářském*, [*Justice in economic life*]; Vol. III *Sociální práce*, [*Social work*].

²² Bedřich Vašek, *Moderní člověk, studie ethicko-pastorální* (Olomouc: Matice Cyrilo-metodějská, 1919), 105–129.

²³ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 442

diagnose the roots of the crisis of capitalist economy, which lie in the destruction of the dignity of the work.²⁴ But despite all almost prophetic insights in the Marx's analysis of capitalism, Vašek is still clearly aware of its deep flaws. Its 'original sin' lies in the materialistic and economic determinism of Marx's thought. Vašek ascribes them to fascination with modern science and uncritical faith in its power to predict economic and social developments. Marx was fundamentally wrong, when he applied scientific methods of 19th century to solve social problems of modernity. Specifically, his neglect of human free will opened a way to catastrophic results.²⁵

Vašek detects several concrete points in the social and economic development of modern society that should prove fundamental errors in Marxist prognosis. Firstly, Marx predicted increasing pauperism of proletariat along with the rise of 'oppression, slavery and exploitation'. Vašek opposes this conjecture with an observation that in the first decades of industrial revolution the situation of the workers was simply unbearable, but as the modernization proceeded, the social condition improved and especially after World War I we might observe the increase of purchasing power of workers, shortening of working hours and more robust safety regulations.²⁶ Vašek thus concludes that Marx's prophecy about the near end of capitalism did not come true and capitalism rather went the way of gradual transformation which brought deepening of ethical standards and humanization of economic life.

On the one hand, Marx contributed to increased self-confidence of the working class and his major achievement is the analysis of the economic order of capitalism in its 'misery and unsustainability', but on the other hand his gloomy forecast 'threw the proletariat into an enchanted castle' and deprived the workers of the joy of work and the joy of life.²⁷ In Vašek's view, the crisis of the modern man is ultimately a spiritual crisis. He thus exhorts all those who strive for social reform to rediscover spiritual sources of social life, which can lead to the reconciliation of all social classes. In his perspective, the Christian vision of social life is not based on the idea of hateful struggle, but rather on the idea of common interest of all in society. So finally, we can see Marx as a prophet, but a deeply flawed prophet – 'it is his fault, that atheism

²⁴ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 123, 185.

²⁵ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 443.

²⁶ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 285–286, 436.

²⁷ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 294, 425.

is unnaturally and almost inseparably linked with the interest of the working class'. Marx combined sober scientific criticism with delusional visions and it is a mistaken spiritual part of his teaching, his fascination with resentment and hate, that represents the core and in the same time the most problematic part of Marxism.²⁸

Are there any common threads in the Soldát's, Reyl's and Vašek's analysis of Marxism? We could point out a structural analysis of Marx's dialectical and historical materialism or an interpretation of his concept of class struggle. Although these themes represent usual points of reference in the critique of Marxism, I would like to focus on two, rather neglected topics that nevertheless took prominent place in the work of the Czech Christian sociologists. Firstly, I would like to add few remarks about the historical origins of Marxism, or more precisely about its birth in the context of other modern ideologies. In this regard, Marxism is taken not only as an isolated feature in the landscape of modern thought, but is rather conceptualized as a logical result of other tendencies in the development of modern society, namely as a consequence of economic liberalism and individualism.

This approach to the origins of Marxism plays important role especially in the work of František Reyl and Bedřich Vašek, but we can find it in several places also in the book by Alois Soldát. Reyl, in accordance with the view typical for the Catholic milieu of the time, searched for the sources of crisis of modern capitalism in the history of early modern era and took the Reformation as the main cause of not only religious but also philosophical confusion, which led to the confusion in social order and ultimately to 'the destructive influence of unlimited economic liberalism'. And it was one of the main credits of socialism and namely Marx and Engels, that they opened eyes of all 'farsighted people', who recognized necessity of the reformation and renewal of the liberal economic and social order.²⁹ Vašek added to this point an assertion that work was robbed of its dignity in the time of economic liberalism, which brought degradation of work and dehumanization of workers who became only means of production and commodity in the labour market.³⁰

²⁸ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 444

²⁹ František Reyl, *Úkoly sociální politiky* (Hradec Králové: Politické družstvo tiskové: 1909), 35–38.

³⁰ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 124.

All Christian sociologists of that era proposed the thesis of a close relations between capitalism, liberalism and socialism that were all understood as manifestation of deep flaws of secular modernity. Specifically Reyl was a harsh critic of liberal individualism, when he wrote: 'Individualism is the most powerful and influential enemy of the Christian order, which it has devalued with its perverted principles to the detriment of humanity.'⁵¹ He expressed some understanding for liberalism as a protest against the oppression of absolutism, but he had no positive words for its philosophical foundations. He was especially sensitive to, in his view, weak moral foundations of liberalism and to its neglect of the principles of natural law. He concludes that 'it can be rightly argued that liberal ideas have corrupted human nature because they have helped the lower instincts to triumph over the better side in man'.⁵² Vašek came to the same conclusion, when he asserted that it would be hopeless to overcome socialism with the old liberal principles.⁵³

These observations are particularly important in the context of the later development of the political thought of Czech Catholicism. Long period of Communist Czechoslovakia led many Catholic intellectuals to the position of fierce and yet justifiable criticism of not only Marxism, but socialism as such.⁵⁴ However, comprehension for the complex relations between socialism and other modern ideologies was rather diminished along with the understanding for the shortcomings of classical liberalism. This is one of the main reasons for the retrieval of the older tradition of the Christian sociology as it developed in the Czech lands before second world war.

Second note is aimed at the religious characteristics of Marxism. All authors were well aware of the fundamentally religious nature of Marx's teaching. As Bedřich Vašek remarked: 'For the conscious socialist, socialism has taken hold of the whole person, it has become his faith anchored in the irrational pools of the soul, it has become his religion, the promise and realization of a new life, a vision that dominates his whole being, prophecy, messianism, eschatology, the promised land.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 347.

⁵² Reyl, *Sociologie*, 354.

⁵³ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 444.

⁵⁴ Cf. Jiří Hanuš, ed., *Křesťané a socialismus* (Brno: Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2012).

⁵⁵ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 421.

Both Soldát and Reyl agreed with Vašek's assessment of religious nature of socialism. And in the same time, they criticize Marx for his transformation of natural religious sentiments to a radically materialistic doctrine. Marx's materialism, which has in itself a characteristic of a political religion, understood all spiritual sentiments merely as consequences of economic situation. This assumption leads to a reductive psychology, limiting all human faculties to the level of material and biological impulses. As Soldát notes, with a reference to a seminal work *Otázka sociální* [*A Social Question*] by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, religion is the only source of true economic reform and only religion represents a path to full humanity.⁵⁶ Also Reyl, when discussing religious and moral context of Marxism, extensively refers to Masaryk and his treatise on socialism. In his overall assessment of socialism, Reyl emphasised that Marx severely distorted historical development of humankind, undervaluing importance of religion and morals. He considered natural inclination of human person to supernatural truth as one of the leading factors of history. In this regard, Marx's opposing opinions can be dismissed as mere fantasy.

At first sight, it might be surprising that Catholic sociologists relied to such an extent on the work of Masaryk, who was rather critical of Catholic religious doctrine and might be labelled as liberal protestant.⁵⁷ Moreover, at least Reyl was directly involved in the polemic with Masaryk over the role of religion in public life.⁵⁸ I suppose that their interest in Masaryk sociological work was not superficial or that the only reason for it was the fact, that Masaryk was the author of perhaps the most systematic overview of Marxism available in Czech at that time, who furthermore paid considerable attention to religious and ethical aspect of Marx's doctrine.⁵⁹ Although the Catholic authors were rather sceptical to the overall development of modern philosophical and political thought, rejecting its alleged sources in the religious revolution of Reformation, they were still able to discern between different

⁵⁶ Soldát, *Nástin*, 167.

⁵⁷ For discussion on Masaryk's sociology of religion, see Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje*, 58–69, for wider view on Masaryk's relations to religion, cf. Josef Smolík and Jan Štěpán, eds., *T. G. Masaryk ve třech stoletích, Rozhovor generací o Masarykových náboženských názorech* (Brno: L. Marek, 2001).

⁵⁸ Havel, *František Reyl*, 75–86.

⁵⁹ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Otázka sociální*, II vol, 6th edition (Praha: Čin, 1947), 183–240.

currents of modernity and did not reject unequivocally any attempts for non-Catholic explanation of the processes of modernization. Thus, they were able to find an unexpected ally in Masaryk, with whose concept of Czech history and modern Czech state Catholic intellectuals clashed regularly, especially in 1920s. Therefore, we can come to conclusion, that the Christian sociology, as was elaborated from the Catholic perspective, was not only a partisan exercise, but a serious attempt to connect rigorous sociological methodology with the principles of Catholic theology that was appreciative to other different yet in many aspect similar attempts.

2. Catholic journalism

2.1 Jaroslav Durych

Marxism was not only a subject of scholarly study of Christian sociologists but was also much-discussed topic in a Catholic journalism of the inter-war period. This time was still an era with flourishing scene of a great number of Catholic periodicals, that reflected on the rise of the seriousness, sincerity as well as self-confidence of Czech Catholicism.⁴⁰ In the following paragraphs, it is my aim to introduce main figures of the Catholic debate with Marxism and illustrate different facets of this discussion. It is apt to open this section with Jaroslav Durych (1886–1962), one of the most distinguished Catholic writers of his time and yet a bitter polemical voice opposing prevailing status quo of a new democratic republic.⁴¹

It was his discontent with the new liberal regime, represented by aforementioned Masaryk, that opened Durych to certain and again quite unexpected appreciation for Communism and Marxism. Throughout his texts on this theme, we might find deep sympathy for the plight of the poor and disgust with bourgeoisie. Specifically in his writing from the beginning in 1920s, Durych's predilection for left-wing radicalism is obvious.⁴² Maybe the best example is his essay from 1924 *Proč nejsem*

⁴⁰ So far, the most complete overview of the Catholic milieu of interwar Czechoslovakia might be found in Martin C. Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v kontextech: 1918–1945* (Praha: Torst, 2010). For a representative online database of Catholic periodicals, cf. www.scriptum.cz (accessed 20 June 2025).

⁴¹ Cf. Martin C. Putna, *Jaroslav Durych* (Praha: Torst, 2003).

⁴² Jaroslav Med, *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova (1938–1939)* (Praha: Academia, 2010), 30, 40.

komunistou [*Why I am not a communist*].⁴⁵ Here, Durych wrote: ‘I have deep and compelling sympathies for communism [...], I like it.’ Yet, as the title of his essay suggests, Durych was not plainly another Catholic with inclination to Marxism or a fellow traveller of Communist movement.⁴⁴ His relationship to Communism, its idea and praxis was much more ambiguous and complex. And this complexity helps to uncover several important traits in the matrix of relations between Catholicism and modern ideologies.

Let’s stay for a moment with Durych’s fascination with Communism. He considered it to be a highest achievement of the human spirit and Communism fascinated him even in his ‘destructive power’ and despite all its ‘physical and metaphysical terrors’.⁴⁵ Particularly cataclysm of Bolshevik revolution promised a total transformation of rotten bourgeois order and beginning of a new spiritual revolution, something which was, for Durych, deeply attracting: ‘Bolshevism, however, hopes that the revolution will burst forth at the decisive moment like a huge bright flame, which will disperse the artificial smoke, fog and darkness that have been prepared and maintained around its work; then its absolute truth will itself consume all the occasional, diplomatic, tentative and tactical lies, so that the simple truth will shine with its sublime, destructive and liberating and victorious glow.’⁴⁶ Therefore, it was predominantly rhetorical power and boldness of Communism, its uncompromising settlement with an old order, that inspired Durych.

On the other hand, and now we come near to the core of his true stance towards Marxism, he was able to see through all problematic, and in his own words, ‘diabolical’ elements of Communism and its ideology. Already in one of his first texts on this topic *Čekám na slovo osvobozující* [*I am waiting for the word of liberation*] Durych wrote, that Communism leads to the suppression of human personality. Anchoring of the critique of Marxism and Communism in the personalistic perspective then became a common trope in the Catholic

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Durych, ‘Proč nejsem komunistou,’ unpublished article for the review *Přítomnost* from 1924. Durych’s essay was a part of a wider survey presented in *Přítomnost* in 1924 and 1925 and issued in 1990 as *Proč nejsem komunistou* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1990).

⁴⁴ François Furet, *Minulost jedné iluze* (Praha : Argo, 2018), 17–55, 266–270.

⁴⁵ Durych, ‘Proč nejsem komunistou.’

⁴⁶ Jaroslav Durych, ‘První máj,’ *Rozmach* 2, no. 9 (May 1924): 121–125.

writing throughout the next decades.⁴⁷ For Durych, a way to liberation does not lie in any form of abstract teaching or ideology, but in a concrete commitment to one's neighbour; that require personal freedom: 'No philosophical or social theory is enough to feed people [...] Only those who have their own freedom within themselves can help others to achieve it.'⁴⁸ Despite all its noble and humanistic rhetoric, we found in Marxism cold contempt for the value of human person. Marxism is essentially trapped in never-ending cycle of its immanent effort to reconstitute human nature, only result of which is its total suppression: '[Marxism] dictates eternal dependence, eternal asceticism, eternal renunciation, eternal suppression of personality and freedom. [...] But just as every philosophical gesture, reaching for the Absolute without Personality, it ends in paralysis and kills its original grandeur by the penalty of grotesqueness; also the gesture of communism, even if not yet accomplished, only indicated and promised, carries within itself the beginning of a convulsion. It forgets that love cannot be destroyed.'⁴⁹

Overall, we can conclude, that for Durych, Marxism and Communism was a useful, maybe even providential tool, which can help to unmask deeply demoralized modern society. Yet, it is not the highest summit of humanity, there is 'even a higher power and in the order of eternity the lower must serve the higher'.⁵⁰ Marxism has in itself a peculiar spiritual root, something that might lead to reconstitution and renewal of human society, but also it has a potentiality for its total annihilation: 'Marxism uses brutal experiments. They are based on the law of the inhuman, supernatural; originating either from some Supernatural power – or from the sheer madness of Lie.'⁵¹

And it is also important to note that Durych perspective on Marxism began to change in the 1930 in the context of the Spanish civil war. Here, Durych took a staunchly anti-communist stance.⁵² He wrote already in 1932 that 'Marxism is becoming obsolete. It is a classic,

⁴⁷ Petr Macek, 'Zápas o člověka. Česká katolická publicistika v letech 1945–1948 mezi marxismem a liberalismem,' *Studia Theologica* 25, no. 2 (2023): 145–147.

⁴⁸ Jaroslav Durych, 'Čekám na slovo osvobozující,' *Našinec* 59, no. 95 (April 1925): 1–2.

⁴⁹ Durych, 'Čekám na slovo osvobozující,' 1–2.

⁵⁰ Durych, 'Proč nejsem komunistou.'

⁵¹ Durych, 'První máj,' 121–125.

⁵² On Durych's view on the Spanish Civil War; cf. Vít Urban, 'Jaroslav Durych a španělská občanská válka,' *Proglas* 7, no. 3, 34–38, also Jaroslav Durych, 'Ve stínu Španělska,' *Řád* 4, no. 7 (February 1938): 399–401.

outdated doctrine, that poses very little danger to bourgeois ideology.⁵³ And in 1937 he followed up with the view that the aim of Communism is in revenge, not in justice. Communism is essentially founded on hate – hate of work and hate of happiness. It is only a simulacrum for sons of capitalists and bourgeois, and its intention has never been to help truly poor people.⁵⁴

2.2 Rudolf Ina Malý and review Tak

Another important contribution to the Catholic discussion with Marxism came from philosopher, journalist and diplomat Rudolf Ina Malý (1889–1965). Malý, in a specific way, followed in Durych's footsteps. Malý adopted Catholic faith at the end of 1920's and he published his main critical work on Marxism in the second half of 1930's. In the time when Durych became fundamentally dismissive towards Marxism, Malý offered similarly unequivocal rejection of the Marxist socialism. In his first major work of political thought – *Kříž nad Evropou* [*The Cross Over Europe*]⁵⁵ published in 1935, Malý presented his views on the modern political ideologies and regimes vis-à-vis a political role of Catholicism. Here, he had not yet offered a theoretical analysis of Marxist theory as in his later texts, but paid considerable attention to the Russian revolution and the phenomenon of Bolshevism.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, his main aim was to depict Catholicism in alliance with Italian fascism as an antidote and counter-balance of modern 'quantitative' and formal democracy, which led, according to his conclusion, to modern totalitarian ideologies of Communism and Nazism.

As this work is not directly focused on the main topic of my paper and was already a subject of several scholarly studies,⁵⁷ I will focus in the following paragraphs on the series of texts devoted exclusively to Marxism published by R. I. Malý in the year 1937 and 1938 in the

⁵³ Jaroslav Durych, 'Soumrak komunismu,' *Akord* 5, no. 3 (March 1932): 138–139.

⁵⁴ Jaroslav Durych, 'V hadí sluji,' *Obnova* 1, no. 17 (July 1937): 1.

⁵⁵ Rudolf I. Malý, *Kříž nad Evropou, Revoluce dvacátého století* (Praha: A. Neubert, 1935).

⁵⁶ Malý, *Kříž nad Evropou*, 120–137.

⁵⁷ Tomáš Bandžuch, 'Rudolf Ina Malý, filosof nového Československa. Příspěvek ke kulturní politice Druhé republiky,' *Paginae historiae: sborník Národního archivu* 31, no. 1 (2023): 62–75, Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje*, 113–114; Putna, *Česká katolická literatura 1948–1945*, 716–732.

biweekly *Tak* [So] and later reissued in one volume as *Marx a Řím ve světle živé skutečnosti* [*Marx and Rome in the Light of Living Reality*].⁵⁸

Unlike Durych in the first period of his writing on Marxism or Czech Christian sociologists, Malý did not express even the slightest positive appreciation of Marxism. A recurring theme of his texts is a search for a proper formulation of the relations between Marxism and socialism. Malý argues that Marxism is a firm foundation or real essence of any socialistic thought. It is Marxism that forms a distinctive character of modern socialism. Bereft of its Marxist substance, socialism becomes only a general moral idealism – ‘such socialism is either just a helpless return to the tradition of philanthropic “utopianism” and humanitarian idealism, or it becomes – a timid, reluctant, but necessary path to Christianity and sincere democracy.’⁵⁹

On the other hand, Marxism embodies unsentimental realism of combat of working class for its political power. For Malý, real socialism is only the revolutionary one, a form of socialism that cannot be separated from Marxism.⁶⁰ Therefore, he made a significant effort to analyse and explain, what he considered to be a real nature of this political ideology. He found its foundations in the alleged Marx’s moral relativism. Malý claimed that Marx neglected any substantial or metaphysical difference between good and evil and proposed purely instrumental morality of class struggle. In this perspective, what is moral is based on the loyalty to the working class; there is no absolute and permanent ethical system – each class and nation had its own morality. The only difference that marks a morality of working class is its predestination for future victory. Because the meaning of history is revealed in the victorious struggle of proletariat, it is its morality, which will prevail. Thus, the truthfulness of any ethical claims is attested by its ability to gain power and all reality of social and political life is only a reality of incessant struggle: ‘Marxism is a powerful rebellion against all moral and cultural catholicity, recognizing no other laws, norms and values than its own will and power, its own demands, goals and culture.’⁶¹

Malý therefore conceptualizes Marxism as a nihilistic philosophical system that is sceptical to any intrinsic and inherent goodness

⁵⁸ Rudolf I. Malý, *Marx a Řím ve světle živé zkušenosti* (Praha: A. Neubert, 1959)

⁵⁹ Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Marx a socialismus,’ *Tak* 2, no. 10–11 (September 1958): 166–169.

⁶⁰ Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Marxismus není kravata,’ *Tak* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 15–18.

⁶¹ Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Marxistický imperialismus,’ *Tak* 2, no. 12–13 (November 1958): 185–186.

of human nature and which is based only on ruthless struggle and mechanical conceptions of nature and society.⁶² In accordance with other Catholic authors of his era, Malý equates to certain extent Marxism with liberalism and claims that both systems stem from the same spiritual foundation. The only difference is in the actor of the whole drama – in case of liberalism, it is represented by a lone individual, in case of Marxism, it is a whole working class. Both liberalism and Marxism are based on voluntarism and economic power as basic factors of any political development and change: ‘Marx’s “class struggle” is essentially the same as “free competition” in liberalism; in both cases, the model for them is the natural struggle for life and the victory of the strongest, not the moral law.’⁶³

In 1938, review Tak published several articles by another interesting commentator on Marxism, Simeon Ghelfand (1895–1963). Ghelfand was a journalist of a Czech-Russian origin, who wrote primarily on philosophical and economic topics. He continuously focused on the analysis of Marxism and after the end of the Second world war published results of his research in several books.⁶⁴ In contrast to Rudolf Ina Malý, Ghelfand sought a more balanced stance on Marxism based on rigorously scientific analysis of Marx’s economic theory. Similarly to earlier Christian sociologists, Ghelfand found a starting point for his critique of Marxism in the discussion on Marx’s theory of surplus value. Ghelfand agrees with Marx that capitalism leads to the exploitation of workers and that it should be a common goal of Christianity and Marxism to fight against any kinds of such abuse of power.

Despite common threads in both doctrines, Ghelfand also sees significant differences. He argues that Marx’s view on a surplus value was fundamentally mistaken. Marx believed that the source of all value was only in the work of workers and thus the exploitation was the source of all profit. Ghelfand cleverly pointed out that in the late-stage capitalism workers were quite easily replaced by automatic machines

⁶² Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Z úvah o podstatě marxismu,’ *Tak* 1, no. 11 (June 1937): 206–208.

⁶³ Malý, ‘Z úvah,’ 208, cf. Malý, ‘Marxistický imperialismus,’ 184.

⁶⁴ For the biography of Ghelfand, cf. Michal Pehr, *Cestami křesťanské politiky: biografický slovník k dějinám křesťanských stran v českých zemích* (Praha: Akropolis, 2007), 78–79; Jan Cholínský, ‘Sociální nauka katolické církve jako zbroj ve studené válce,’ in *Výjádření úcty a vděčnosti: sborník o protikomunistickém odboji*, ed. Pavel Žáček (Praha: Ministerstvo obrany, 2015), 204–236. Ghelfand’s after-war books on Marxism: *Dialektický materialismus* (Praha: Univerzum, 1947) and *Marxismus a křesťanský sociální reformismus* (Praha: ČSL, 1946).

that could work with a minimal human input. In this scenario, value is produced more by capitalist investment, than by the work of proletariat. In Ghelfand's view, the main problem of his time was not exploitation, but rather technological, structural unemployment that led to desperate social situation and opened up a way for modern totalitarianism. In conclusion, he saw the only possible solution in the Catholic social doctrine and its ideas of solidarity, subsidiarity and justice: 'But hatred is not the way to social harmony – and neither is Marxism, with its 'scientific' hatred and its cleverly constructed 'surplus labour' and 'surplus value'. There is only one way, which is the truth and life: Jesus Christ.'⁶⁵

2.3 Other authors and reviews

A limited scope of our paper does not allow us to pay sufficient attention to other important authors within Czech interwar Catholicism, like active politician and theorist of political Catholicism Bohumil Stašek⁶⁶ or historian Karel Schwarzenberg.⁶⁷ I would like to briefly mention one of the most important Catholic review devoted to the political, social and cultural issues – a review *Řád* [*The Order*] published since 1932 by the young generation of Catholic intellectuals led by philosopher Rudolf Voříšek.⁶⁸ Although *Řád* was focused on extensive commentaries of the political situation of its time, it did not publish any systematic analysis of Marxism per se. Rather it offered reflection of the Catholic social doctrine and newest papal encyclical or overview of social aspects of Thomistic philosophy. On Marxism, it was mostly limited to translated articles by important European authors, like Nikolai Berdyaev, Waldemar Gurian or Amintore Fanfani.⁶⁹ From its own, Czech

⁶⁵ Simeon Ghelfand, 'Omyly marxistické vědy,' *Tak* 2, no. 3 (May 1938): 57, also cf. Simeon Ghelfand, 'Krise a krach liberalistické ekonomiky,' *Tak* 2, no. 8–9 (August 1938): 143–146.

⁶⁶ From his commentaries on political situation and modern political ideologies: Bohumil Stašek, *Obnova lidské společnosti* (Praha: Ústřední sekretariát Československé strany lidové, 1920), Bohumil Stašek, *Cesta ze světového labyrintu* (Praha: Ústřední sekretariát Československé strany lidové, 1932).

⁶⁷ For the overview of Schwarzenberg's work, including his texts on Marxism, cf. Karel Schwarzenberg, *Torzo dila* (Praha: Torst, 2007).

⁶⁸ Voříšek wrote only one article focused on the problem of socialism: 'Kapitalismus, socialismus a stavovství,' *Řád* 3, no. 1 (1936): 28–41. It compared liberalism and socialism with an alternative approach of Catholic corporativism. Promotion of corporativism was one of the main goals of the review *Řád*.

⁶⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev, 'O demokracii a socialismu,' *Řád* 1, no. 2 (1932): 76–86, Waldemar Gurian, 'Kritika bolševismu,' *Řád* 1, no. 3 (1932): 147–155, Amintore Fanfani, 'Kapitalistický duch,' *Řád* 3, no. 1 (1936): 41–49.

authors, the most systematic observations were written by Stanislav Berounský, journalist and translator. But he did not pay attention to the systematic and theoretical aspects of Marxism, but rather to its current development in Europe in 1920's and 1930's.⁷⁰

Other important Catholic reviews, like publications of Dominican order *Na hlubinu* and *Filosofická revue* were also engaged in the discussion about political and social questions. *Na hlubinu* and its main authors, theologians Silvestr Braitó and Reginald Dacík, both members of the Dominican orders, published several articles on Marxism in the years 1936 and 1937. They were mostly short notes that avoid a systematic analysis of Marx's thought. Rather they offered spiritual exhortation and like other texts of this period pointed out the problematic spiritual roots of both Marxism and liberalism and capitalism.⁷¹ *Filosofická revue* mostly paid attention to the general and systematic treatises on the social issues inspired by the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* and did not focus on the problem of Marxism as such.

Conclusion

Modern political ideologies born from emancipatory and secularization processes of the 19th and early 20th century brought about immense challenge both for the Catholic social thought and praxis of political Catholicism. While the experience with the oppression under totalitarian regimes of Nazism and Communism led Catholic authors to embracing democracy as the only viable and just political system and resulted in the formation of Christian democratic parties, one of the pillars of the political life of after-war Europe, situation in interwar Europe was much more ambiguous. As I tried to illustrate on the example of the Czech interwar Catholicism, intellectuals of that age opposed not only the extreme ideologies of Marxism and, to a lesser extent, Fascism, but they also strove to cope with the legacy of unregulated liberalism of the previous century.

⁷⁰ Stanislav Berounský, 'Primát hospodářství,' *Řád* 1, no. 2 (1932): 108–110; Stanislav Berounský, 'Moderní socialismus,' *Řád* 1, no. 3 (1932): 135–144

⁷¹ Silvestr Braitó, 'Okřtíme komunismus?,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 8 (1936): 561–562; Silvestr Braitó, 'Naše povinnost k sociálním otázkám,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 8 (1936): 562–564; Reginald Dacík, 'Katolicismus a komunismus,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 9 (1936) 628–631; Silvestr Braitó, 'Boj proti komunismu,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 10 (1936): 707–709; Silvestr Braitó, 'Omyly v boji proti komunismu,' *Na hlubinu* 12, no. 3 (1937): 208–209.

Our analysis of the Catholic approach towards Marxism, both in the scientific discourse of Christian sociology and in Catholic journalism showed a diverse spectrum of different perspectives. While the more balanced and somewhat appreciative assessment of Marxism might be found in the scholarly treatises of Alois Soldát, František Reyl and Bedřich Vašek, journalism represented by Jaroslav Durych and Rudolf I. Malý aimed for more spirited critique of Marxism. Although we paid considerable attention to the criticism of Marx's economic thought, again especially in the books by Catholic sociologist, the main aim of our analysis was to show how Catholic intellectuals perceived spiritual and religious foundations of Marxism. The main common trope of almost all analysed texts was their conceptualization of Marxism as both an atheistic ideology destroying all religious principles and in the same time paradoxically as a powerful spiritual movement. In this regard, Marxism was not perceived only as a school of philosophical thought or a political or economic system but rather as a caricature of religion and delusional spiritualism. Even though some authors, like Jaroslav Durych, appreciated in a certain way the spiritual power of the Marxist revolution, their final assessment was negative – in the final analysis Marxism represents nihilistic and destructive force in the modern history of humankind.

Critique of Marxism, which we tried to follow on the preceding pages, was not only a critique of Marx's thought *per se*, but rather a complex attempt to criticize the project of modern immanentistic and secular politics as such. In this regard, liberalism and Marxism represent but two sides of the same coin – a political vision bereft of any metaphysical anchoring and built around a notion of inevitable struggle for power. And the Catholic intellectuals took it as a challenge for themselves to find an alternative solution to this malaise of modernity in a project founded on Christian notion of the ontology of peace. To assess whether they were successful in their endeavour or not is a task for another paper.

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