

From Francis Bacon to William Golding

From Francis Bacon to William Golding:
Utopias and Dystopias of Today and of Yore

Edited by

Ligia Tomoiagă, Minodora Barbul
and Ramona Demarcsek

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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BRIEF INTRODUCTION

A beautiful event took place last October at the North University of Baia Mare, The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Baia Mare is the capital city of the County of Maramureş, in the north of Romania. The Department of Philology and Cultural Studies organized an anniversary academic and cultural event, celebrating 450 years since Francis Bacon's birth, and 100 years since William Golding's. We invited worldwide scholars to an interdisciplinary fathoming of the depths of the human attraction toward **utopias and dystopias**. Whether they use the Baconian method 'invented' by the 1st (and last) Viscount Saint Alban, or the allegorical treatment of places and characters of the British dystopian poet and novelist, there are hundreds of writers, poets, artists, philosophers and critics that have added new facets and interpretations to the dreams or nightmares of humanity concerning their social organization, political hazards, humanist and religious values, as well as future heavens or apocalypses.

From Francis Bacon to William Golding: Utopias and Dystopias of Today and of Yore was not a mere academic conference; it was a complex event, in which the two concepts were discussed by philologists, philosophers, specialist in politics, psychology, religion and social studies, and, at the same time, they were interpreted by musicians, actors, and fine arts students in complex performances and exhibitions. The discussions took place in free panels, in which the professionals of different fields were not separated, they came together and shared their ideas with specialists in complementary studies. Another important part of this international event was the excursion in Maramureş, an ancient part of Romania, situated in the north of Transylvania, a region that has preserved many traditional customs, and offers a good example of what rural life meant in the past, and what it means today. The participants had an opportunity to see old, traditional villages, alongside very newly built houses and villas, in a composite site of old and new utopias; political utopias and dystopias were alluded to when we visited the Memorial museum dedicated to the victims of communism and the Elie Wiesel memorial house in Sighetu Marmăției; artistic reflexes of how Romanian traditional artists interpreted life and death were also present, especially with the visit to the Merry Cemetery, one of the most famous places in

Maramureș. The beautiful scenery, the ancient music, as well as the traditional organic food, prepared in people's homes the same way it was prepared a thousand years ago (and meeting the current utopia of "eating healthy"), helped to create the perfect atmosphere for exchanging ideas, and fathoming the depths of the vast subjects of this extraordinary inclination of mankind to create possible alternative worlds.

Dr. Ligia Tomoiagă, dr. Minodora Barbul, and dr. Ramona Demarcsek, the organizers of the event, and the editors of this present volume, thought that it would be a very good idea to not restrict the outcome of this event to a volume of proceedings, but to encourage other contributions from academics who were not in Baia Mare, but who considered the subjects interesting and wanted to send their papers. We were most grateful for this, as in this way, the discussions on our proposed topics did not stop there, with just three days of conference. Thus, the present volume contains a selection of papers that were delivered at the event, and have the oral quality of such public lectures, which the editors considered too precious to alter in any way, and, at the same time, it contains papers that were not publicly presented, but sent in by scholars who felt that they needed to express their opinion on the matters discussed. At the same time, the three organizers and editors decided to put these contributions in two separate chapters – philological studies and studies in the field of philosophy and knowledge, to confer structure to the volume, although for those that participated at the event, there were no such divisions. Unfortunately, we could not include the artistic part of the event, as such performances are ephemeral.

Consequently, we have put together an eclectic volume, in which contributions are very diverse: there are quite a few assiduous scientific studies, alongside more empirical views written under the form of essays, and coloured with a few others which just raise certain issues letting the reader meditate on those particular speculations. All of the above come to form an original approach to the themes proposed by the organizers and editors. We are very grateful for that.

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PART I:
SOCIAL SCIENCES

UTOPIA, RELIGION AND THE GOD-BUILDERS: FROM ANATOLY LUNACHARSKY TO ERNST BLOCH

ROLAND BOER

Ernst Bloch is usually credited with rediscovering the utopian tendencies of religion – especially the Bible and theology – and then introducing them into his somewhat heretical Marxism. However, despite the appearance of Bloch's breath-taking originality, he is actually heir to an older and now largely forgotten movement: the God-Builders. Thus, I undertake an exercise in rediscovery of a badly neglected, if not lost, dimension of utopian thought. That that will entail some detailed reconstruction of the God-builders goes without question.¹

Who are the God-builders? They were perhaps one of the most intriguing components of the social-democratic movement in Russia in the first years of the twentieth century – although they were resolutely opposed by Lenin at the time (which makes them far more interesting). Among others, they included Anatoly Lunacharsky and Maxim Gorky. Rather than pursuing links between Orthodoxy and Marxism ("God-seekers"), God-builders were atheists who sought to increase the emotional power of Marxism by drawing upon positive elements from religion, especially Christianity. That is, they sought to provide a dimension to Marxism that went beyond the focus on cold theory, a source of enthusiasm, an emotional and ethical appeal – what Ernst Bloch would later call a "warm stream" of Marxism. That warm stream included the emphasis on collective living, the utopian features of religion and the elevation of human beings as the central concern, all of which would come

¹ The challenge of such a reconstruction is at least twofold. For those who still see profound hostility between religion and Marxism, the sustained efforts by the God-builders and Bloch to explore the many connections between the two will be challenging enough. For those who recall vividly the dystopian dimensions of communism, especially in Eastern Europe, the question is whether one may reassess communism's utopian claims.

to a crescendo with the revolution, along with a strong sense of the political ambivalence of religion itself.

Lunacharsky's Warmth

Lunacharsky spoke like a god.
That night Lunacharsky was a genius.²

Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky was by far the most articulate spokesman for God-building (*bogostroitel'stvo*). Playwright, poet, polemicist, gifted orator, romantic, art and literary critic, prolific writer,³ expert on the history of religions, revolutionary, sometime opponent of Lenin, first Commissar for Enlightenment in the new Soviet government,⁴ Lunacharsky is a fascinating figure. It is far beyond my remit to deal with the vast realm of Lunacharsky's thought and life,⁵ for my focus is his enthusiastic proposal for God-building. The key text here is his *Religion and Socialism*,⁶ published in two volumes between 1908 and 1911,

² *The October Storm and After* (Moscow: Progress, 1967), p. 276.

³ An incomplete bibliography of Lunacharsky's writings on literature and art alone lists more than 2000 titles. The eight-volume edition of his *Collected Works*, first published in 1963-7 and now available online at lunacharsky.newgod.su/lib, is also very incomplete, containing works on literature, art, sculpture and music. Beyond all these, he published a massive amount of material on education after being appointed Commissar of Enlightenment.

⁴ For an excellent study of the Commissariat and Lunacharsky's role, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). See also Ransome's insightful reflections and the collection of articles and speeches by Lunacharsky, entitled *On Education*: Arthur Ransome, *Russia in 1919* (New York: Dodo, 2011 [1919]) pp. 83-6: 83-6, Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981).

⁵ Although the available critical work is woefully thin, useful works include those of Tait, Yermakov and Fitzpatrick: A.L. Tait, *Lunacharsky: Poet of the Revolution (1875-1907)* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1984), A. Yermakov, A. Lunacharsky (Moscow: Novosti, 1975), Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Bergman's frustratingly superficial article does at least provide a workable survey: Jay Bergman, "The Image of Jesus in the Russian Revolutionary Movement: The Case of Russian Marxism," *International Review of Social History* 35 (1990).

⁶ Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 1* (Moscow: Shilovnik, 1908), Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*

although significant traces may be found throughout his work, both before and especially after this text.⁷ I shall outline its main arguments before exploring Lunacharsky's wider engagements with religion.

Marxism, argued Lunacharsky, was caught at the time in what Bloch later called the "cold stream" of materialist reason and science. And Plekhanov, the "father" of Russian Marxism, was largely to blame. Despite his respect for Plekhanov's erudition, Lunacharsky found him locked into pure rationalism. Lunacharsky blamed this on Plekhanov's heavy reliance on the late Engels of *Anti-Dühring* and *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.⁸ The problem was that they had lost what may be called the "warm stream" of Marx's own thought and practice.⁹ This was the

(Moscow: Shilovnik, 1911). Another work written at the same time provides a more concise statement of his position: Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, "Atheism," *Ocherki Po Filosofii Marxisma*, eds. Vladimir A. Bazarov, Matvei Berman, Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, P.S. Yushkevich, Alexander Bogdanov, I. Gelfond and S. Suvorov (St. Petersburg: 1908). *Religion and Socialism* has proved exceedingly difficult to find, largely due to Lenin's spirited attacks on God-Building and the condemnation by the editorial board of *Proletary*. The editors of the eight-volume *Collected Works* chose not to include this "wayward" in that collection – Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Collected Works*, 8 vols. (Moscow: New God, 2011 [1963-67]), Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Progress, 1963-67). Given this unfavourable early press and the subsequent Bolshevik victory, *Religion and Socialism* remained a work out of favour. Of the few extant copies remaining, the one in the National Library of St. Petersburg is too fragile to scan for a .pdf. Only after further inquiry, through Sergey Kozin, was a copy found in the Lenin Library in Moscow. A high fee for scanning the two volumes resulted in a much treasured pdf copy, which is in my possession and to my knowledge the only .pdf in the world. Apart from republication in Russian, a translation is also planned.

⁷ The plethora of citations to his later work in the discussion that follows indicates how pervasive the language of God-building was, even after the October revolution.

⁸ Friedrich Engels, "Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science," *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1877-8 [1987]), Friedrich Engels, "Herr Eugen Dührings Umwälzung Der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring)," *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 20 (Berlin: Dietz, 1877-8 [1973]), Friedrich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1880 [1989]), Friedrich Engels, "Die Entwicklung Des Sozialismus Von Der Utopie Zur Wissenschaft," *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Dietz, 1880 [1973]).

⁹ "The ethical appeal in scientific socialism is tremendous; on the surface cold and exact, it harbours tremendous reserves of practical idealism. And so all one has to do is bring out in a semi-poetical, publicistic manner this latent content of the

sensitive, enthusiastic, ethical Marx, the one who, alongside his deeply scientific practice, also provided an emotional appeal as a moral philosopher, the one who, according to Lunacharsky, “said that poets need many caresses”.¹⁰ Actually, Marx was the latest in a long line of prophetic figures, full of fiery condemnation of oppression and longing for deliverance, his precursors being no lesser figures than Christ and Spinoza. The key was then a synthesis of science and irrepressible enthusiasm.

How to recover this lost warm stream, full of enthusiasm and emotional appeal? One avenue was art, a lifelong passion for Lunacharsky, and the other, also an abiding interest, was religion.¹¹ He meant not the belief in divine figures or a supernatural world which determines this one, but rather the emotive, collective, utopian and very human elements of religion.¹² In this respect, he set out to counteract the oppressive forms in which Christianity was so often purveyed, in which it may easily become an ideological means of ensuring subservience, resignation to one’s lot, punishment for sin by a vengeful God and the offer of a reward in the next world.¹³ Over against this deforming version of theology, Lunacharsky

teaching of Marx and Engels for it to acquire a new attraction for such elements”, Lunacharsky quoted in Yermakov, *A. Lunacharsky*, pp. 34-5.

¹⁰ *The October Storm and After*, p. 274.

¹¹ On the relation between religion and art, Lunacharsky takes varying positions. At times, he sees a strong overlap between the two, with mutual rubbing together producing some of the great works of art, which need to be defended and preserved against the desires of the puritans within the Soviet government. Indeed, both religious and artistic treasures need to be preserved and restored, since communism draws upon and raises to another level all that best from the past. After all, “God is good when he is dead” (Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie* (Moscow: New God, 2011 [1963-67]), pp. 233-53.) At other times, he argues that art, which can be either religious or anti-religious, may be used in the struggle with the churches (Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, pp. 170-1, 274-6.)

¹² In the debate between Lunacharsky and Metropolitan Alexander Vvedensky in 1925, the latter cites *Religion and Socialism* in order to undermine Lunacharsky’s opposition in the debate between the philosophical worldviews of Marxism and religion, despite their many overlaps: A.I. Vvedensky, “Otvetnoe Slovo A.I. Vvedensky,” *Religiia I Prosvesenie* (Moscow: New God, 2011 [1925]), p. 220. A little earlier, in a text from 1924, Lunacharsky distinguishes between a Marxist approach to understanding religion and the ideology of a ruling elite (clergy), which sides with the ruling class. Marxism seeks to understand the former as responding to real life need for people to make sense of their world, even if it is riddled with superstition, and opposes the latter: Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, pp. 132-8.

¹³ See also Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, pp. 84-5, 150-1, Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow:

sought to identify at least five elements that would lead to human flourishing: the religious drive for collective life, its utopian dimensions, elevating human beings as the focus of all religious thought, the role of revolution and the political ambivalence of a religion like Christianity.

Christian Communism

Although Lunacharsky devotes considerable space to dealing with Christianity (understandable given his context), he is also keen to enlist the results of the much wider history of religions for his arguments.¹⁴ Thus, he argues that religion has a rich tradition of expressing the deep desire for communal bonds, a feature one may find in its Latin etymological root: “religion is a ‘bond’ [*religiia* – “*suyaz*”]”.¹⁵ One also found, he argued, this collective dimension in the practice of early Christianity, particularly in its communism. Lunacharsky would never relinquish this argument, arguing time and again that early Christianity was characterised by comradeship, equality and honesty, that the early message was a “Gospel of the poor”, of the slaves, artisans and proletarians, and that the early communities were “permeated by a spirit of collectivism”, sharing what little property they had. They may even be described as a form of “democratic, egalitarian socialism”, if not Christian communism.¹⁶ Now a crucial distinction appears, one that runs throughout Lunacharsky’s assessments of Christianity: communal, democratic and radically equal living constitutes only one dimension, for the other element is revolution itself. Christianity may have exhibited elements that qualify it as communist in the first sense, but what about revolution? Here Lunacharsky is unequivocal: Christianity was also revolutionary, since it included a rough justice for the wealthy and ruling class:

The communist spirit of early, popular Christianity is not in doubt. But was it revolutionary? Of course it was. In its negation of the cultural world of the time – radical, merciless negation – and in its posing in its place a completely new way of life, it was revolutionary. Any ideology which

Progress Publishers, 1973), pp. 99-100, Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, p. 233.

¹⁴ See also Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, pp. 15-47, 147-51.

¹⁵ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 1*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, p. 111. See also Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, pp. 114, 76, 84-5, 92, 20-1, 73-6.

truly mirrors the mood of the oppressed masses cannot not be revolutionary.¹⁷

He will deploy this distinction between communist living and revolution in a number of ways, at times combining them and at others exploring their contradictions, but here he sees enough similarity on both counts between Marxism and Christianity to call them both communist, for “their ideals are partly congruent”.¹⁸

At times he qualifies these statements, pointing out that the revolutionary dimension tended to be other-worldly (although he does discuss with approval the Münster revolution of 1534-5 by the Anabaptists¹⁹), that the socialism in question did not address the question

¹⁷ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, p. 139. Later, in 1921, he reformulates this statement: “Is it democratic? Yes, it is democratic. Biblical Christianity has deeply democratic roots because it does not equate the last with the first, but puts the last first. Is Christianity revolutionary? Yes, it is revolutionary because it touches on the very Day of Judgement, saying without hesitation that one must not sin against one’s neighbour. And finally, is Christianity socialist? Yes, it is doubly socialist”. Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, p. 179.

¹⁸ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, p. 159.

¹⁹ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, pp. 181-3. For seventeen months, from February 1534 until June 1535, Münster was under the control of radical Anabaptists. During this brief and tumultuous period a communism of goods was instituted (based on Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35); all non-Anabaptists were expelled or executed; twelve judges were appointed as in Israel of old; the kingdom of David proclaimed, the self-appointed king, Jan van Leyden, took many wives; Münster was declared the “New Jerusalem”; everyone believed that Christ was about to return to earth with a massive army to wipe out all their enemies; and there were myriad dreams, visions, and direct encounters with God. Not content with taking over the government of Münster, these radicals set about organising campaigns to conquer the rest of the world. As one would expect with radical social experiments, there was much confusion; events tumbled upon one another; and each day brought a new crisis. Here the historian’s often vain desire to string together a coherent narrative faces its greatest test. By early 1534 the struggle for dominance of the town had swung towards the Anabaptists. Visitors (including the colorfully named Bartholomeus Boeckbinder) in January 1534 arrived from the Netherlands and began baptizing adults; the Anabaptists took over the city council and expelled all non-Anabaptists; and the disgruntled and suddenly homeless Roman Catholic bishop, Franz von Waldeck, laid siege to his own see with the help of none other than the Lutherans. The fiery Jan Matthys from Haarlem then turned up and, believing that he was the new Gideon, led a group of thirty out from the walls to raise the siege and to certain death. By August 1534 the lascivious Jan Beukelszoon (van Leyden) declared himself king and immediately took a number

of production, remaining within the realm of consumption, and that the democratic element lasted only as long as the early church was made up of the lower classes. All of which enables him to deploy a narrative of betrayal, if not a fall from grace. Soon enough, it becomes a religion of power and hierarchy, ready to maintain that God justifies the rich and mighty to assert their influence over the masses, promising reward in heaven in exchange for subservience on earth. How did this happen? Lunacharsky's answer focuses on both the Apostle Paul and questions of class. The two are interwoven, for that "social opportunist", Paul, emphasises human sin, for which forgiveness may be found through individual actions here on earth. In this way, Christianity was rendered palatable for the petite bourgeoisie (*meshchantsvo*) of that time, thereby watering down and eventually dispensing with the proletarian nature of the early church.²⁰ Class is inextricably tied up with this development, for although the original church may have appealed to poor peasants and workers, it soon attracted a morally-bereft aristocracy and propertied classes, who then smoothed the passage for Christianity to become a religion of empire.²¹

of wives, especially in light of the decreasing number of men, and with some struggle a community of goods was established. A betrayer then let a forward party of the besiegers into the city on June 24, 1535, and the leaders – Beukelszoon and a couple of other key figures – were brutally tortured, finally killed, and placed in cages on the steeple of St. Lambert's Church as a warning. The ousted Roman Catholic bishop cleverly exploited the political situation to the full, turning Münster back into a Roman Catholic city in the wake of the discredited Anabaptist Reformers. See further Roland Boer, *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), pp. 9-13.

²⁰ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, pp. 58-70.

²¹ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvetienie*, pp. 121-4. In many respects, this argument draws nigh unto the collective emphases of early, pre-Marxian communism, particularly its versions found in Saint-Simon, Fourier and even Moses Hess, but especially the accounts of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky: Rosa Luxemburg, "Socialism and the Churches," trans. Juan Punto, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970 [1905]), Rosa Luxemburg, *Kirche Und Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Stimme-Verlag, 1982 [1905]), Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity*, trans. H. F. Mins (London: Socialist Resistance, 2007 [1908]), Karl Kautsky, *Der Ursprung Des Christentums: Eine Historische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: J.H.W. Dietz, 1977 [1908]).

Justice, Happiness and Living Ingots of the Revolution

Further, Lunacharsky was perhaps the first to see a link between the urgent desire for socialism and the utopian dimensions of religious belief, a connection that would be fully developed by Ernst Bloch. Indeed, socialism may be described not as a paradise, but as “a kingdom of justice, a kingdom of happiness that may be founded by people through the harmonisation of their forces both for work and struggle”.²² Or, in another vein, he speaks of the “forward march of mankind, with the help of social struggle, science and technology”, in the midst of which it “is not necessary to look for God. Let us give him to the world! There is no God in the world, but there might be. The road of struggle for socialism ... is what is meant by God-building”.²³

But Lunacharsky took a step further, arguing that they should enthusiastically preach Marxism as an anthropocentric religion in which “Man” was the new “God”, a human divinity who would finally realise her or his full powers, celebrating them in the revolution. So the revolution itself becomes the key moment of God-building, constituting a new time in which such a construction would take place. It was indeed an ecstatic moment for a man given to an intensity of feeling. In the midst of the October revolution itself, he wrote that it was “the greatest, most definitive act of ‘God-building’”.²⁴ Yet Lunacharsky was not fool enough to believe that these new gods had actually been formed, even in such a creative moment as the revolution. Thus, in his new role as Commissar for Enlightenment after the revolution, he continued to make full use of the language of God-building, stressing that the new human being was an ideal, for which we find resources in theological traditions: “Our ideal is the image of man, of man like a god, in relation to whom we are all raw material only, merely ingots waiting to be given shape, living ingots that bear their own ideal within themselves”.²⁵

²² Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, p. 214.

²³ Lunacharsky quoted in Yermakov, A. *Lunacharsky*, p. 35.

²⁴ Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Velikii Perevorot* (St. Petersburg: 1919), p. 31. To Sukhanov he exclaimed, “These events are epoch-making! Our children’s children will bow their heads before their grandeur!”. Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*, p. 1.

²⁵ Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, p. 57. This quotation comes from a lecture, “What is Education?” in which he also says, drawing now on Feuerbach: “Our word for education (*obrazovaniye*), like the German *Bildung*, comes from the word meaning *image* or *form* (*obraz*). It would seem that when our nation needed to define what every man ought to make of

Ambivalence: Between Democracy and Oppression

Implicit within Lunacharsky's effort is what may be called an awareness of the political ambivalence of a religion like Christianity. By seeking out those elements that build up and lead to human flourishing, he sought to exclude the dimensions of religion that are destructive. At an explicit level, Lunacharsky takes two approaches, one more insightful than the other. On the less insightful side, he falls into the trap of arguing that Christianity was originally a religion of communist living, with an emphasis on justice, good will and democracy. But then it was corrupted by the church and its clergy, thereby turning a "chaotic primitive church into a strong, cunning, subtle instrument of oppression".²⁶ This is nothing less than a narrative of betrayal, a fall from grace (Genesis 2-3) in which paradise is lost due to the culpability of human agents. At times he comes closer to a dialectical approach, suggesting that this betrayal was never complete and that a protest element would always return, attacking the church and its clergy throughout the Middle Ages and culminating in moments such as the Reformation or the Münster revolution.²⁷ Every now and then Lunacharsky attains a full appreciation of the political ambivalence of the internal logic of the Bible itself. Thus, taking as his example the biblical prophets, he writes:

The prophets were *revolutionaries* because they fought for the people who were under subjection and they sought a social upheaval in the spirit of egalitarianism. They were [also] *reactionaries* because they placed their ideal in the past, in the simplicity of the morals and in the patriarchal

himself and what society ought to make of him, they had a mental picture of the image or form of a human being emerging from the material of some sort... You know how religious people used to say that man was created in the image of God, and that he had in him something of God... Ludwig Feuerbach ... rightly remarked that it is not man who is created in the image of God, but God that is created in the image of man... If you look more closely at either the gods of Greece, who were dazzlingly beautiful, immortal, wise beings, or at the definitions Christianity makes of its gods when it says their gods or their God (the trinity, three-in-one) is all-beneficent, all-powerful, all-righteous, all-present – then you may think that man is far from being all-powerful and all-beneficent. The point is that the pagans in their gods and the Christians in their God were creating the *ideal* of man". Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, pp. 45-6. See also similar observations in other writings on education: Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, pp. 165, 245, 47.

²⁶ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosviesenie*, p. 92.

²⁷ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosviesenie*, pp. 92-102, 20-5.

equality of the pastoral period, and they fought against economic progress that had to go through concentration of land and of capital.²⁸

Here we see that he means not the tendency to split into many different groups, each claiming to be followers of the true heritage of the early church, but tension internal to the logic of the biblical material in which it may side with power and be a source for protest and resistance.

As far as Christianity is concerned, he stresses that for many years it was torn between what he called – somewhat anachronistically – proletarian and petit-bourgeois or ruling class tendencies. While the apocalyptic elements kept alive the former, Paul and the Gnostics advocated the latter by emphasising faith over revolt and delaying the imminent revolution to a perpetually delayed Second Coming of Christ.²⁹ Here Lunacharsky insightfully locates the perpetual Christian tension between human and divine agency: the more revolutionary elements provided significant space for human activity while their ruling class opponents assigned such a task to God. Nevertheless, what he did not see was a deeper dialectic in which the most radical apocalyptic groups relied most heavily on divine intervention as a justification for their revolutionary politics – although this insight is implicit in his admiration for the Münster Revolution. In other words, Christianity may take oppressive forms, all too readily appropriated by the nobles and the priests for their own dominance, and it may also be “essentially a complete denial of all noble rank, of all noble birth, of any war, of any vengeful feeling”.³⁰ Christianity may be both a “creed of democracy” and a justification for “meekly bearing the yoke” of oppression.³¹

Religion and Socialism was by no means the only time Lunacharsky had shown an interest in religion, as the many references to his other

²⁸ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 1*, p. 165.

²⁹ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, pp. 53-101.

³⁰ Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, p. 150. One may trace here the influence of Engels’s argument concerning early Christianity, which he in turn drew from none other than Bruno Bauer: Friedrich Engels, “On the History of Early Christianity,” *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1894-5 [1990]), Friedrich Engels, “Zur Geschichte Des Urchristentums,” *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 22 (Berlin: Dietz, 1894-5 [1972]), Friedrich Engels, “Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity,” *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1882 [1989]), Friedrich Engels, “Bruno Bauer Und Das Urchristentum,” *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Dietz, 1882 [1973]), Roland Boer, *Criticism of Earth: On Marx, Engels and Theology*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

³¹ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosvesenie*, p. 92.

works show. Despite his frequently avowed atheism and denial of a supra-sensory world,³² he had studied the history of religion in depth on more than one occasion, beginning with the works of Paris libraries, especially the Musée Guimet in Paris in 1897, after he had managed to avoid Russian military service due to his extreme short-sightedness. Once again he returned to the subject during the six months of solitary confinement in the Taganka prison in Moscow in the second half of 1899. Here, despite insomnia through bad food and lack of exercise, he felt that he had clarified his “personal religion”, which was to be expounded almost a decade later in *Religion and Socialism*. His poetry, plays, stories, literary and artistic criticism and even reflections on education also evince a preoccupation with religious and often biblical themes (along with, apparently, social reform and married women), which may be read both in terms of the influence of those studies and the cause for them. Again and again the settings of his poetry, plays and stories are populated with spirits, angels and demons, if not the gods themselves, or they are set epochs, usually the Middle Ages, saturated with religion.³³ An attentive reader also finds theological themes laced throughout his writings on education, art and literature.³⁴

³² Among many instances, see especially the lecture, “Why I Do Not Believe in God”, as well as his argument against a spiritual world: Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosviesenie*, pp. 146-4, 206-14. Lunacharsky claimed that he could not remember a time when he believed in God, already deriding religion and the monarchy among his school friends. He relates an occasion when he was playing the workshop of a silversmith: taking up the ubiquitous icon, he bashed it on the table and called on God to prove his existence with some suitable punishment. Instead of the Almighty, the silversmith grabbed him by the ear and sternly took him to his mother, who refused to stand in for God’s wrath: Tait, *Lunacharsky: Poet of the Revolution (1875-1907)*, p. 6.

³³ A partial list includes the stories *Wings*, published in *Pravda*, issue 4 (1904), *Charudatta the Wise*, from *Pravda*, issue 9 (1904), *The Funeral*, appearing in *Kurer*, issue 27 (1903), *Smiling Philosopher* (an attack on Bulgakov), from *Kurer*, issue 27 (1903), *An Interview With the Devil*, from *Vestnik zhizni*, issue 3 (1906), and the play, *The King’s Barber* (Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Pesy* (Moscow: 1963 [1906]), pp. 37-129.) Somewhat different Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, “On the Anniversary of the Ninth of January,” *Proletary* 13 (2011 [1905]), Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, “K Iubileiu 9 Ianvaria,” *Proletary* 13.9 August (2011 [1905]). See Tait’s comments on these works in Tait, *Lunacharsky: Poet of the Revolution (1875-1907)*, pp. 64-9, 80-2, 86-92, 101-2.

³⁴ Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, pp. 45-58, Lunacharsky, *On Literature and Art*, pp. 79-106, 59, 70-85, 210-17, Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Prosviesenie*, pp. 105-10.

From God-Building to Bloch's Utopia

Many are the lines that lead both into and out of Lunacharsky's position. I have already identified the emphasis on communal life in early Christianity as an inspiration. Beyond his early studies in the history of religions, we may also draw nearer to Lunacharsky's own Orthodox tradition, for which salvation is a process of theosis (deification), in which Christ overcomes the breakdown of communion with God rendered through sin, thereby restoring an even fuller humanity as the union of divine and human, in which human beings once again – as at creation but now beyond that state – are not merely in the image of God, but in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:27).

By far the most significant feature of this work is the way it foreshadows Ernst Bloch's lifelong utopian project in so many ways.³⁵ I have not been able to determine whether Bloch knew of Lunacharsky's text (if so, it would be a minor reference, buried in a passing allusion, rather than a clear acknowledgement of his forerunner), but the anticipation is striking. I have mentioned the fact that we may see Lunacharsky's contribution in terms of what Bloch termed the "warm stream" of Marxism, for Bloch too sought out the emotional, enthusiastic and aesthetic appeal of Marxism as a counter-balance to its coldly rational dimension. Both Bloch and Lunacharsky shared similar, almost romantic personalities, able to feel the experiences of life deeply, apt to be carried away by a poem, fairy-tale, song, drama or nursery rhyme. To that may be added a crucial motivation that Bloch shared with Lunacharsky: in order to win over the peasants, as well as (for Lunacharsky) the intelligentsia, Marxism needed far more than hard reason and political action, for it also needed to touch the worldview in which peasants lived, if not the many workers who had so recently left the land for the factories.³⁶ That

³⁵ Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. J. T. Swann (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), Ernst Bloch, *Atheismus Im Christentum: Zur Religion Des Exodus Und Des Reichs*, Ernst Bloch Werkausgabe, vol. 14 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), Ernst Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Ernst Bloch Werkausgabe, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), Ernst Bloch, *Geist Der Utopie, Zweite Fassung*, Ernst Bloch Werkausgabe, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985).

³⁶ "We are surrounded by great numbers of people for whom the appeal of religion fills some definite need. Among them are elements (in particular the peasantry, as I saw it) for whom it would be easier to reach the truths of socialism through their

worldview was structured in terms of biblical narratives, quotidian religious practices and theological beliefs.

Like Lunacharsky, Bloch sought to break the dam holding back this warm stream by delving deeply in literature (particularly his favoured Faust), art and music, but above all religion, focusing on his favourite text, the Bible. Here were to be found the prophetic tradition of condemnation of the downtrodden, paradigms of collective life, the argument for the rising up of the *homo absconditus* (in place of the *deus absconditus*), utopian dimensions and even the political ambivalence of Christianity.

For Bloch, the images of collective life are found above all in the counter-traditions of the Bible, especially the rebellions against authority and power. Here the downtrodden would voice their dissatisfaction and resistance, opposing together the impositions from above and thereby providing glimpses of the new Eden, the New Jerusalem. Steering more closely to Lunacharsky, Bloch argued that that the “exodus out of Yahweh”, the atheism that lies within Christianity, would lead to the full realisation of human potential.³⁷ Rarely if ever does a day or a life end with the sense of fulfilment; much remains undone and wished for, a feature that not only gives voice to the utopian urge within us all, which also develops once human beings realise that we are the ones who can achieve what we have traditionally regarded as the prerogative of the gods.

As I have argued elsewhere,³⁸ Bloch wrests the theological doctrine of transcendence away from God and returns it to human beings, so much so that transcendence is no longer a divine attribute but a human one. Like Lunacharsky before him, Bloch bravely states that the only means for human beings to achieve divine status – to attain a longed-for but as yet unattained potential – is to banish God from existence. Lunacharsky may have drawn upon his Orthodox tradition (salvation as deification) and Bloch upon the Lutheran (God’s radical transcendence), but the result is strikingly similar. Nonetheless, Bloch’s deployment of this theme is arguably more sustained than in Lunacharsky’s hands, especially when he steps beyond human beings and identifies this process in matter and

religio-philosophical way of thinking than in any other way”, Lunacharsky quoted in Yermakov, A. *Lunacharsky*, p. 34. A more cynical reading would see Lunacharsky’s God-building as purely a ploy to win over such people (Lenin took such a line), but the persistence and enthusiasm with which he propagates his program suggest that he genuinely believed in it.

³⁷ Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, Bloch, *Atheismus Im Christentum: Zur Religion Des Exodus Und Des Reichs*.

³⁸ Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), pp. 51-2.

nature.³⁹ Transcendence now becomes a transformed world, that is, utopia itself.

That utopian drive of religion also links Bloch to Lunacharsky, except that Bloch would make utopia the consistent search of his life's work. As we saw, for Lunacharsky, socialism signals the forward push of humanity which is expressed in art, music, beauty and religion. Above all, the deepest longing for a qualitatively different future is focused on the communist revolution, the decisive moment of God-building. In Bloch's hands, utopia becomes universal, a desire and hope found in the myriad moments of the full range of human and natural existence, from glimpses in everyday life through festivals and myths and literature to the revolution itself. Yet, Bloch gives this search a decisive twist: if revolution is the act of the oppressed against their masters, then utopian glimpses of that revolution will be found in many stories of rebellion. One finds them in what are now narratives and myths of "sin", of resistance to the white-guard god of the despots. In the Bible these include the story of Eden, with its oppressive God who treats the first humans as children only to find that they rebel in league with an intriguing serpent; in the fatal conflict of Cain and Abel, where another face of God appears, the one who protects Cain with the well-known mark; in Jacob's wrestling with God (El in this case, not Yahweh) in Genesis 32; in the rebellion of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11; in the Nazirites, those enigmatic figures who vow not to cut their hair, drink strong drink and call the people back to their desert, Bedouin-like life in the wilderness; in the oppressive deity of Moses and Aaron, who seeks to punish the people's constant murmur of rebellion in the wilderness; in the insurrections of Miriam, Moses' sister, and Korah against that authority; even in the two figures of Moses, who is both liberator of the slaves and theocratic tyrant in the wilderness; in the protests of Job against his inhuman treatment by this same Yahweh; in the prophetic denunciations of economic maltreatment and religious hypocrisy; in Jesus' stringent criticisms of the quislings who would accommodate the Roman colonisers; and in the fiery apocalyptic revolutionary protests of the Apocalypse against empire and its gods. At times the bloodthirsty, vengeful God had the upper hand, but at others (admittedly less frequently), the rebels win out through cunning and ruse.

All of which brings us to the political ambivalence of Christianity, of which Lunacharsky became fully aware in his more lucid moments. As Bloch put it in relation to the Bible: it is "often a scandal to the poor" but

³⁹ Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, pp. 229-31, Bloch, *Atheismus Im Christentum: Zur Religion Des Exodus Und Des Reichs*, pp. 303-5.

also “the Church’s bad conscience”.⁴⁰ In order to trace how this tension works itself out in biblical materials, Bloch identifies the crucial dialectic whereby the very myths of oppression and punishment for “sin” are the means by which moments of rebellion are preserved. That is, both elements are inescapable dimensions of the biblical heritage, a situation that demands the most astute discernment of myths. The Bible has often been and continues to be read as a friend of the rich and powerful *and* it has been and continues to be an inspiration for revolutionary groups seeking to overthrow those same powerful fat cats. Throughout his great works on utopia – *The Spirit of Utopia* and *Principle of Hope* – this ambivalence, or rather multi-valence shows its face time and again. However, in the much neglected *Atheism in Christianity* it is at the forefront of Bloch’s thought, particularly in relation to the Bible.

At times Bloch overdoes it, seeking a constant thread of both demonical rulers and resistance throughout the Bible, resistance that often ended up, he suggests, in militant sects which were systematically wiped out, such as the Ophites who saw the true God in the serpent of Eden and the creator God as a vile demiurge. I would prefer more scattered and disconnected resistances, local and by no means necessarily connected. At this point Bloch’s valuable strategy of discernment comes into its own: a process of judicious and dialectical judgement as to what is liberating and what seeks to crush such liberation. Even God is split and ambivalent – after all, he does have many names and identities, such as El, Yahweh, Adonai, El Elyon, El Shaddai, El Berit, El Olam, El Roi, Abir, Pahad, Shebaot, Adon and even Baal. God may appear as vengeful and terror-full, but then this same God turns out to be a champion of those who protest, fall and protest again. In the latter case, one may identify an incipient atheism, a protest against the alignment of the divine with abusive human power. And that protest leads to human beings finally being able to stand on their own feet, no longer scraping the ground in abject obeisance. Bloch too, it seems, was a God-builder, carrying on the tradition and enriching it, even if he may not have been aware of Lunacharsky’s text.

Conclusion

My focus has been a rediscovery of a lost dimension of utopian thought, locating a significant precursor to Ernst Bloch’s project. Many

⁴⁰ Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, pp. 25, 21, Bloch, *Atheismus Im Christentum: Zur Religion Des Exodus Und Des Reichs*, pp. 53, 41.

indeed are the elements that anticipate Bloch, although he was to elaborate them in a much richer fashion. I finish on a slightly different note, offering some assessment of God-building itself, in the hands of both Lunacharsky and Bloch. To begin with, Lunacharsky has indeed recovered the oft-forgotten fullness of theology, which is often caricatured as other-worldly, concerned more with the supernatural world and its working than the natural one. By contrast, theology is incredibly rich, dealing with very human and this-worldly concerns: the nature of mythology (the central stories with which theology deals), nature and the environment (creation), with the human condition (anthropology), why the world is the way it is (hamatology or the doctrine of sin), the problem of suffering (theodicy), the nature of the human subject (via Christology), how human beings might live together (ecclesiology), and the nature of history and hopes for the future (eschatology). In other words, theology deals as much with immanence as transcendence, with history, the human condition, social interrelations and nature, as it does with the gods. Even the divine – no matter how self-sufficient it may in some traditions be argued to be – is known only through its interaction with the mundane. Or, to use another terminology, theology is as much a secular as an anti-secular program, focused on this world and this age (the meaning of *saecularum*), as with one that is beyond this one.⁴¹ To his credit, Lunacharsky has recovered the very this-worldly nature of theology.

On a more negative note, however, the claim that “man” should become a god has a long tradition of theological suspicion, in which the elevation of human beings above or in place of the gods becomes the justification for myriad despotisms, in which the human beings in question believe that they are omnipotent and omniscient, let alone capricious and arbitrary. In short, it fails to include a strong (materialist) doctrine of evil, for the very best of intentions and hopes can quickly turn sour, being brought to bear to justify new forms of oppression – as the Strugatsky brothers’ novel, *Hard to Be a God*, illustrates so well.⁴² All too often, the claim to divine sanction, if not divine status – from Roman emperors to absolute monarchs to cult leaders –, by human beings has been used to justify very earthly power. These comments should not be taken as a wholesale criticism of Lunacharsky’s or indeed Bloch’s efforts at building gods out of human beings, which may be read positively as an attempt to provide emotive resources for those downtrodden to stand up for

⁴¹ Roland Boer, *Criticism of Religion: On Marxism and Theology II*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 29-30, 250-1.

⁴² Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky, *Hard to Be a God* (New York: Seabury, 1973).

themselves, but that they should be tempered with a strong doctrine of evil that would identify and make us wary indeed of the temptations I have just outlined.

This awareness of the negative possibilities even in the midst of (Christian) communism appears in a singularly insightful reflection by Lunacharsky on representations of Jesus:

Christ had two faces. As a communist, as a teacher of humble wisdom, of living happily for God, with direct faith in the existence of the highest form of goodness, which leads everyone to good deeds, he was a model of meekness and forgiveness. As one who unmasked the existing governmental order, as one who made a spirit of revenge boil up in the masses, he terrified the world and made it more sombre. He was a great scold, ready to set the whip in motion, although the threat of it was a sufficiently cruel fantasy.⁴³

At a first reading, this seems to be another statement concerning the political ambivalence of Christianity, now embodied in the way Jesus is represented and appropriated. On this score, the whip may fire up the masses and terrify the world,⁴⁴ but the meekness becomes a tool in the hands of the ruling classes to justify exploitation and resignation to that lot. However, we need to read more carefully: the dialectical twist is that the “model of meekness and forgiveness” is part of Jesus’ communist side. In making this argument, Lunacharsky invokes the distinction between communist and revolutionary features of Christianity (as we saw earlier), but now he explores a potential negative dimension to this opposition. Left to its own, the communist emphasis on goodness, wisdom and good deeds may well lead to all manner of legitimisations of oppression! All too easily, Jesus becomes the crown prince of God, the son of the tsar in heaven before whom all should bow in meek subservience. Does it then require the more revolutionary dimension of the whip to counterbalance this negative dimension of the representation of Jesus’ communism? Lunacharsky suggests so, but may this not also be appropriated by the rulers who claim to speak on behalf of the common people from whom they now require subservience? In other words, Lunacharsky unwittingly opens up the possibility for a stronger notion of evil even in the midst of his utopian program.

⁴³ Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, pp. 139-40.

⁴⁴ In this light, Jesus was “the model of an avenger, a judge, and a founder of life ... the model of blissfulness in chiliastic force, the model of earthly life in his love, patience, and communism” (Lunacharsky, *Religiia I Socializm: Tom 2*, p. 16).