Epilogue
1953, 1968, 1995: Three Perspectives

1. 1953 from the standpoint of 1995

When the first version of *Marxism and Christianity* was published in 1953, under the title *Marxism: An Interpretation*, Stalin was not yet dead and the Cold War had already taken determinate form. In February 1953, NATO created a unified military command. In June, the Soviet suppression of a workers’ rising in East Berlin exemplified the ruthless subordination of the whole of Eastern Europe to Soviet interests. It had already long been part of the stock-in-trade of many Western apologists to accept at its face-value the Soviet Union’s claim that its social, political and economic practice embodied Marxist theory, in order to justify their own root-and-branch rejection of Marxism. And it was generally, if not universally, taken for granted among both theologians and ordinary church-goers that, because Marxism was an atheistic materialism, and because persecution by Soviet power was designed to deny, so far as it could, any independence to the lives of the churches, Christianity had to identify itself with the cause of the anti-Communist West. It was,

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2 MacIntyre 1953.
of course, true that some parts of Marxist theory and some Marxist predictions had genuinely been discredited. It was also true that Christian orthodoxy could not but oppose that in Marxism which was either a ground for, or a consequence of its atheism. But the simple-minded wholesale anti-communist rejection of Marxism and the equally simple-minded understanding of the relationship between Marxism and Christianity as one of unqualified antagonism exaggerated and distorted these truths in the interests of the then dominant Western ideology.

It was against what I took in 1953 and still take in 1995 to be these distortions that I asserted the central thesis of this book: that Marxism does not stand to Christianity in any relationship of straightforward antagonism, but rather, just because it is a transformation of Hegel's secularised version of Christian theology, has many of the characteristics of a Christian heresy rather than of non-Christian unbelief. Marxism is, in consequence, a doctrine with the same metaphysical and moral scope as Christianity and it is the only secular post-Enlightenment doctrine to have such a scope. It proposes a mode of understanding nature and human nature, an account of the direction and meaning of history and of the standards by which right action is to be judged, and an explanation of error and of evil, each of these integrated into an overall worldview, a worldview that can only be made fully intelligible by understanding it as a transformation of Christianity. More than that, Marxism was and is a transformation of Christianity which, like some other heresies, provided grounds for reasserting elements in Christianity which had been ignored and obscured by many Christians. What elements are these? They are most aptly and relevantly identified by asking what attitude Christians ought to take to capitalism and then noting how that attitude relates to the Marxist analysis of capitalism.

What, on a Christian understanding of human and social relationships, does God require of us in those relationships? That we love our neighbours and that we recognise that charity towards them goes beyond, but always includes justice. An adequate regard for justice always involves not only a concern that justice be done and injustice prevented or remedied on any particular occasion, but also resistance to and, where possible, the abolition of institutions that systematically generate injustice. Christians have far too often behaved badly – thereby confirming what Christianity teaches about sinfulness – in failing to recognise soon enough and to respond to the evils