

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Ten, Number Two

Between Old and New: On Socialism and Revolutionary Religion

Professor Roland Boer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Newcastle, Australia

Abstract:

Within Marxist debates, tensions continue to exist between modern socialism and the revolutionary religious tradition. (By revolutionary religious tradition, I mean the long history of revolutionary movements inspired by different religions.) I propose to analyse this question by focusing comparing the European situation, with its long history of “forerunners of socialism,” and China, especially the Taiping Revolution of the nineteenth century. While Europe presents the relation between modern socialism and revolutionary religion in relatively well-known terms, the Chinese situation generates greater complexity in what may be called a dialectic of old and new. In order to see how this dialectic unfolds, I examine Mao Zedong’s wary assessments of the Taiping Revolution, which was inspired at its core by innovative reinterpretations of revolutionary Christianity. I close by proposing that the tension between older revolutionary traditions and the current moment is a tension that characterises the revolutionary tradition itself.

“A radical revolution does (what previously appeared as) the impossible and thereby creates its own precursors” (Žižek 2012: 209). This suggestive observation by Žižek frames the argument that follows, in which “radical revolution” signals modern socialism (stemming from Marx and Engels) and its “precursors” are the earlier revolutions inspired by religion. The revolutionary break seeks to change the very

coordinates of the situation in which revolution first arose, but the changed coordinates also recreate the past. Thus, the perception of earlier revolutionary movements – especially of a religious nature – as a revolutionary tradition was enabled by the profound shift in circumstances produced by the present revolution. However, this new situation creates a unique tension, which may be understood as the tension between old and new, albeit an old that has been created by the new. But what, exactly, constitutes the old and what the new?¹ In a European situation, modern socialism appears as the more recent development, with revolutionary religion having a much longer, pre-socialist history. Obviously, this frames the tension in a specific way. However, what happens when revolutionary religion is a relatively recent phenomenon? How does socialism respond? This is the situation in China, specifically in the relations between the Taiping Revolution and the socialist revolution. So in what follows I undertake a comparison between these two contexts, beginning with the European context, which will be more familiar to most readers and frames the debate in an equally familiar fashion. However, most of my attention will be directed towards the Taiping revolution of the nineteenth century. Not only was it the most significant and largest global revolutionary movement of the time, far surpassing the 1848 revolutionary attempts in Europe, but it was also the moment when revolutionary Christianity appeared in China. I am particularly interested in how the Chinese communists, especially Mao Zedong, responded to the Taiping revolutionaries, will close that examination.² My argument closes by returning to the question as to what constitutes a revolutionary tradition.

Europe: Modern Socialism and Its Forerunners

If, however, the effort to establish a communistic order of society necessarily conduced to heresy, so, on the other hand, the struggle with the Church favoured the growth of communistic ideas (Kautsky 1897: 9).

In a European and indeed Russian situation, the problem is relatively well-rehearsed: if socialism is a new movement, and if a socialist revolution is a qualitatively new ‘event’, then how do they relate to former revolutionary movements, especially those of a religious inflection? Indeed, during times of revolution and their immediate aftermaths, this tension was heightened to hitherto unknown level. Press hard on the newness of the revolutionary moment, and a chasm opens between that moment

and earlier revolutionary efforts. Yet if one emphasises revolutionary forerunners that have prepared the ground, then one risks losing sight of what is new about the current revolution.

But let me backtrack for a few moments and ask what actually constitutes the revolutionary religious tradition – one that Žižek has sought to recover in his own way (2000, 2001b, 2003, 2009). For Žižek, this is part of a larger search for the genuine revolutionary break, the moment when the coordinates of existence are truly changed. It may be Lacan's traversing of the fantasy or the feminine formula of sexualisation; it may be Lenin's actual freedom rather than formal freedom; it may be the Jewish observance of the Law to the letter, to the point of subverting the Law; and it may be the Christian embracing of excess, of the fantasmatic kernel, so much so that the ordinary human being, Jesus of Nazareth, reveals the impotence of God. However, this problem of what constitutes the truly radical core of Christianity has a long pedigree, going back to Engels in his effort to come to terms with his Calvinist and very biblical past. Instead of the strict predestination and excessive concern with morals, Engels instead draws out the radical implications of the Calvinist focus on grace.³ He argues that the origins of Christianity itself were revolutionary: it appealed to the poor and exploited, the peasants, slaves and unemployed urban poor; it shared many features with the socialist movement of his own day (factionalism, false prophets, difficulties in organisation and raising funds, utopian ideals and so forth); and it eventually rose to become a mass movement (Engels 1894-95b; 1894-95a). Some four decades earlier, he had offered the first Marxist interpretation of the Peasant Revolution, led by Thomas Münzer at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century (Engels 1850b; 1850a).⁴ Engels tended, especially in treatment of Münzer, to argue that theological language was a cloak for speaking of political and economic grievances and aspirations, indeed that such a language was the only one possible at the time. Of course, this enables him to argue that modern socialism breaks with that tradition, for it speaks directly of the "real" issues.

By contrast, Karl Kautsky, to whom Engels entrusted the task of a more thorough understanding of revolutionary religion, occasionally argues that it was precisely theological reasons as much as economic ones that led to many of these movements. In his lengthy study Kautsky identifies the following: early monastic communism, mysticism, and asceticism; the Waldensians, in the twelfth century and

still existing today in Piedmont, where they hold to the model of Christian communism in the book of Acts; the Apostolic Brethren, founded by Gerardo Segarelli, from Parma in Italy, who in 1260 renounced his possessions and dressed as the apostles, begging and preaching repentance and gathering a movement around him; their successors, the Dulcinians, under Fra Dolcino of Novara (1250-1307), who was forced to lead the community into a fortress and undertake military excursions, until they were crushed; the Beguines and Beghards, who lived simple lives in communities across the Netherlands in the twelfth century; the Lollards, followers of John Wycliffe who stressed personal faith, divine election, the Bible, and were involved in a series of uprisings in England; the Taborites, a fifteenth century movement that championed asceticism, communal living, and the establishment of the kingdom of God by force of arms; the Bohemian Brethren, who believed that the kingdom of God was among them in communal life and worship and who had a profound influence on Czech literature through the translation of the Bible. This list comes from Kautsky's unjustly neglected work, *Forerunners of Modern Socialism* (Kautsky 1895-97a; 1895-97b; Kautsky and Lafargue 1922; Boer 2014c).

A closer look at this list reveals two features of such movements. 1) A profound criticism of status quo at all levels – religious institutions, political formations, economic exploitation, social injustice, and personal life. Such criticism is based on a radical alterity, which includes the gods themselves and the guidelines or laws for human existence. From this perspective, the current situation is found to be severely wanting, especially when the assessment is based on scriptural traditions that speak of social justice and equality. In the more radical movements, such criticism can become revolutionary. 2) A call to a communal life, often with property in common and the principle of “to each according to need, from each according to ability” (the idea was originally a religious one, broached in Acts 4:32-35, although it became a staple of socialist movements (Marx 1891b: 87; 1891a: 21)). Many of the movements I listed earlier attempted various applications of such communal life, an application that continues today with religious collectives. However, a common tendency is to eschew revolutionary objectives and to assume that the example of such life will persuade others of its benefits, eventually reforming the whole of society. The argument made is that revolutionary actions so often lead to a crushing of the group, so better to focus on communal life. But this too contains a danger:

such collectives must live in a world very different from the one they seek to model, and so compromises must be made, which may lead to the dissolution of the project.

Yet, Kautsky's work raises acutely the problem I identified earlier: if there is such a long tradition of revolutionary movements inspired by religion, then how does modern socialism differ? His writing on the topic exhibits a curious anxiety: the more he studied such a tradition, the more he felt the need to identify how they fell short of the achievements of socialism. Engels had argued that earlier religious revolutions had used the language of Christianity – like a cloak – to speak of economic and political grievances. At times Kautsky takes this line, speaking of the veil or religion, although it is not a major feature of his argument. Instead, he draws upon a range of positions to ensure a break between what he calls “heterodox communism” and modern socialism. For example, the class character of that communism was less articulated and inchoate; it was unpolitical and often passive, awaiting the miraculous intervention of God and the divine armies; it was united a hatred of papal power, but otherwise was diverse and fractious. Above all, it did not seek to change the actual mode of production. They may have espoused and practised the biblical directive to have “all things in common,” sharing what wealth they had; but they did not seek to become owners of the means of production through revolutionary action. For this reason, such communities were inevitably short-lived, absorbed into the prevailing mode of production once again.⁵ All of these points serve to distinguish the older tradition of revolutionary religion from socialism, for the latter arose in the context of clear class distinctions, is politically active, targets the owners of the means of production and seeks to overturn their monopoly on economic power.

Kautsky's dilemma also appears in the work of the fascinating Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Left Bolshevik and – after the Russian Revolution – Commissar for Enlightenment in the new Russia. In his unjustly neglected work, *Religion and Socialism*, Lunacharsky discusses at length the Christian communist tradition. Again and again he emphasises that early Christianity featured comradeship, equality, and honesty. Their message was a “Gospel of the poor,” of slaves, artisans, and proletarians, and their communities were “permeated by a spirit of collectivism,” sharing what little property they had (Lunacharsky 1911: 111). To back up his argument, Lunacharsky draws upon all the biblical texts concerning such communism and the resolute opposition to acquiring private property – nothing less than a type of “democratic, egalitarian socialism” (1911: 65; see also Lunacharsky

1985: 76, 84-85, 92, 120-21, 173-76). Yet, democratic, communal, living with radical equality constitutes only one dimension, for this form of Christianity also exhibited a revolutionary tendency. How so? It advocated rough justice for the wealthy and ruling class:

The communist spirit of early, popular Christianity is not in doubt. But was it revolutionary? Yes, of course. In its negation, the radical, merciless negation of the civilized world of the time, in posing in its place a completely new way of life, it was revolutionary. Any ideology that truly reflects the mood of the oppressed masses can only be revolutionary in its depth (Lunacharsky 1911: 139; see also Lunacharsky 1985: 177-78).

Was Lunacharsky, then, a type of Christian socialist, seeing in revolutionary Christianity the forerunner of Marxism? At times it seems so, with his arguments that Marx is the last of a long line of prophets, that radical Christianity and Marxism are partly congruent, and that socialism completes religion. Perhaps aware of the direction of these arguments, he also sought ruptures with this revolutionary Christianity, especially after the October Revolution. For example, in his 1925 debates with Metropolitan Vvedensky, a leader of the progressive Renovationist movement in the Russian Orthodox Church, Lunacharsky sought to tone down his enthusiastic assertions concerning the connections between early Christian communism and Marxism. While Vvedensky attempted to argue that socialism should be included under the umbrella of progressive Christianity, Lunacharsky countered: in certain respects, Christianity may be “closely linked with communism,” especially in its early forms and also in Christian sects of the sixteenth century, yet this still does not mean that Christianity “really rotates around the axis of socialist ideas.” So he stresses the reactionary side of Christianity – its “colossal historic privilege” – and a chronic factionalism that makes it impossible to find any type of Christianity “that could be called true” (Lunacharsky 1985: 194). Here he invokes the saying of Matthew 19:24: “And I tell you it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” The camel is the church, “loaded with its religious treasures” and the kingdom of heaven on the other side of the revolutionary eye of the needle is nothing less than socialism (1985: 201). Indeed, the idea of a contemporary communist-Christian like Vvedensky is an “absurd phenomenon” (1985: 111).

At one level, these arguments may be seen as tactical. With the erudite Vvedensky threatening to trap him with the point that socialism must be seen within

the broader framework of religion, invoking Lunacharsky's arguments from *Religion and Socialism* to do so (Vvedensky 1925: 220), Lunacharsky opts to retreat from some of his earlier formulations. Yet, in doing so, he manifests once again the tension between rupture and continuity, between old and new. Emphasize too much the break and you lose all contact with what has gone before, attempting to construct the new order from a clean slate. Move in the other direction and stress the continuity with various streams that have preceded your own movement and you lose the newness of our own cause. Depending on the circumstances, Lunacharsky leans now on one side, now on the other, attempting mediation between them.

China: The Taiping Revolution

The Emperor and his pedantic mandarins have become dispossessed of their own sovereignty (Marx 1853: 94)

This way of framing the problem was generated by a long pre-socialist history of radical religious movements, a situation common to Europe and Russia.⁶ One way of redressing this bias is to consider a very different example: the Taiping Revolution⁷ (1850-64). Briefly put, this revolution introduced a radically new moment in China's long and often tumultuous political history. This was arrival of revolutionary Christianity in China. At the same time, the revolution can also be seen as part of a millennia-old pattern whereby the imperial line had abrogated the "mandate of heaven" and peasant armies had overthrown the empire only to install yet another emperor. Obviously, here the relation between old and new gains some complexity. Initially, we have an inversion, for the old is now a pre-Christian pattern of upheaval, while the new is Christianity itself. How all of this relates to the communist revolution of the twentieth century twists the dialectic of old and new to a whole new level.

Before I examine this issue, let me analyse the revolution itself. Beginning in the southern province of Guangxi in the mid-nineteenth century China, the revolution came to control vast territories in the eastern and most populous parts of China for over a decade. It arose as a result of pent-up resistance to economic, political and ethnic oppression, to the imposition of imperial will by an ethnically foreign dynasty (the Qing were Manchus), to colonial predations by European countries, and to the ideological and religious framework of the old system (Confucianism). The revolution

was by far the largest – in terms of human beings involved, military engagements, organisation, promise and devastation – of any revolutionary movement in the nineteenth century. From its small beginnings in the south, it swept to the northeast and took the old imperial capital of Nanjing (renamed Tianjing, the Heavenly Capital), which formed the centre of a new state. Many were drawn to the Taiping movement, including peasants, ethnic minorities, earlier groups of organised resistance (such as the Heaven and Earth society, at times dubbed “bandits”), and any who were disaffected and disenfranchised. At its peak, the revolution managed to field peasant armies of up to a million, developed new and superior military skills, and looked as though it would conquer the centre of weakening Qing power in Beijing itself. If it were not for foreign intervention, especially by the British Empire, it may well have succeeded. As Platt (2012) argues, the British decision to intervene was based on the threat of losing both the North American and Chinese markets. That intervention was crucial, even if it often seemed to follow its own agenda separate from the Qing forces. The balance tipped imperceptibly against the Taiping Revolutionaries, with Nanjing falling in 1864 and the gradual defeat of isolated armies and groups continuing into the 1870s and even 1880s.

For my purposes, a number of features stand out, all of which coalesce around the fact that the movement radically challenged the justifications and assumptions of the dynastic system itself, declaring the whole imperial system idolatrous and in need of abolition. The first of these features was its unorthodox form of Christianity, based on original and detailed interpretations of the Bible by its leader, Hong Xiuquan (Spence 1996, Reilly 2004). Some debate exists as to which biblical material influenced Hong most: was it the collection of tracts called *Good Words to Admonish the Age* (*Quanshi liangyan*), written by the evangelical convert, Liang Afa, or was it the translation of the whole Bible by the missionaries Karl Gützlaff and Walter Medhurst, respectively translating the Old and New Testaments? Reilly (2004) argues convincingly that the Bible itself, rather than the tracts, that played a greater role, even though Hong first learned of Christianity from the tracts. Liang’s tracts were deeply individualising and other-worldly, drawing mostly on the New Testament. By contrast, a number of facts suggest the Bible itself was the key, and that Hong drew his primary inspiration from it: the importance of Old Testament texts in Taiping theology, particularly the Ten Commandments, the story of creation and the stories of Genesis; the political nature of so much of the material, including

the Kingdom of Heaven; the reverence held by the Taiping for the Bible, down to devoting immense energies to printing and even correcting copies when they were based in Nanjing; evidence from a number of sources that the Bible so printed was the Gützlaff-Medhurst translation of 1838⁸; continued engagement in interpreting the Bible.⁹

However, Hong Xiuquan initially relied on the tracts by Liang. He had picked up the tracts when he travelled south from his home village to Canton to sit the civil service examinations for the imperial administration. After his third failure in the examinations in 1837, he collapsed and experienced a series of visions full of the demons and gods of traditional Chinese mythology. Unable to make sense of the dreams, Hong eventually – after failing his exams for the fourth time in 1843 – turned to the tracts, which provided an early key to his visions: he had met God the Father in physical form, with a long beard and wearing a black dragon robe, who vouched for the authenticity of the Bible and had entrusted him with slaying demons (the evil ones, who were embodied in the Qing dynasty). He also learned that Jesus was God's elder son (reinforced by later careful study of the New Testament), but that he, Hong Xiuquan, was the younger son. Here we find a crucial feature of such revolutionary movements, in which visions and dreams are as much a source of inspiration as the Bible itself. Both were seen as forms of revelation, one from the past and the other in the present. In Hong's case, the biblical material provided the interpretive key for the dreams. But when his dreams ceased, the movement turned to other visionaries and to detailed interpretation of the Bible.¹⁰ Yet Hong remained the founder, since his initial visions and interpretive insight provided the ideological basis of the movement.

However, at this early stage, Hong had not acquired a full copy of the Bible. This happened at least by 1847, when he spent some time in Hong Kong with the missionary Issacher J. Roberts, a protégé of Gützlaff. Study of that Bible brought out the political implications of his religious experience, especially the task of establishing a heavenly kingdom on earth¹¹ and punishing the evil ones and idolaters. The Bible in question was of course the Gützlaff-Medhurst version, which offered a number of crucial translations that had profound implications. Most importantly, it consistently translated the names for God in the Old Testament as Shangdi (Sovereign on High), and occasionally Huang Shangdi (Supreme Sovereign on High).¹² This was the name of the Lord of Heaven from the Chinese classics, first

proposed as the Chinese name for God by Matteo Ricci in the sixteenth century, then banned by papal decree in 1715 (and mandating Tainzhu, Lord of Heaven), and finally advocated primarily by Medhurst in a sustained debate among the Hong Kong missionaries in the nineteenth century. Thus, in their translation of the Old and New Testaments, Medhurst and Gützlaff used Shangdi for the name of God. The choice had immense repercussions for Hong Xiuquan and the Taiping, for emperors since the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) – the first to unify China – had used the term Huangdi (supreme *di*). However, since the *di* character can mean both emperor and god, this meant that the emperor was claiming a title reserved only for God. Thus, the imperial throne blasphemed the most high Shangdi and created idols in his place. As the agents of Shangdi, the Taiping revolutionaries would need to destroy the object of God's wrath. The criticism was as religious as it was political.

This theological innovation led Hong and the Taiping followers to a revolutionary position. Crucially, this revolutionary approach relied heavily upon the Ten Commandments, with a focus on the first three concerning the worship of God and the ban on graven images. In the eyes of the Taiping revolutionaries, those commandments referred directly to the Qing dynasty and the whole imperial system, which sought to place other gods before the high God, Shangdi.¹³ In doing so, it blasphemed not merely by the claim that the emperor was in many respects a sacred figure, but through the many symbols of imperial rule throughout China. For these reasons, the imperial system had to be destroyed. In order to indicate their intent, the Taiping armies systematically smashed the symbols – statues, temples, buildings – of imperial power (they also destroyed any other religious representations, especially of Buddhism and Daoism). Other biblical texts also provided ample inspiration, for, as other revolutionaries have found, the Bible is not short of incendiary texts. I restrict myself to one example, drawn from Exodus. As the Taiping armies were making their way north-east to capture Nanjing, they were harried by Qing armies. In this context, they drew upon the story of the flight of the Israelites from Egypt:

By day in a cloud,
By night in a pillar of fire,
The True God
In person saved them.

He caused the Red Sea
Water to part in two;
To stand like walls,
That they might pass between.
The people of Israel
Walked straight ahead,
As though on dry ground,
And thus saved their lives.
When their pursuers tried to pass,
The wheels fell from their axles;
The waters joined up again,
And they were all drowned.
Thus the Great God
Displayed his great powers,
And the people of Israel
Were all preserved.
When they came to the wilderness
And their food was all gone,
The Great God Bade them not be afraid.
He sent down manna,
In abundance for each of them;
It was sweet as honey,
And all ate their fill (Spence 1996: 149-50).

While the Bible provided Hong and his collaborators with the justification for revolution, it also outlined a way of life to be followed. Religious observance was central, with regular services comprising prayer, singing, scripture readings, sermons and the sacrament of baptism for new converts. Important also was daily prayer and the recitation of the Ten Commandments at the communal meals. These meals were organised in groups of 25, with each having an overseer. Crucially, all goods – food for the meals, clothes, money and so on – were held in a communal treasury, distributed to people as required. In other words, goods were held in common – a persistent feature of Taiping economic life in all the regions they conquered.¹⁴ Shangdi had created the earth and all that is in it, wishing its plenty to be shared fairly among his children.¹⁵ Yet it went further: since there was neither slave nor free

in Christ (Galatians 3:28), the Taiping movement abolished the hierarchical distinctions of the Confucian order, referring to each other as “brother” and “sister.” Further, they followed an old revolutionary practice, in which relative gender equality (Galatians 3:28) went side by side with strict gender segregation (the seventh commandment taken to a new level).¹⁶ The Taiping army included many women regiments, since all members of the movement did military service, and the new examination system (based on the Bible) included women with men. Opium, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, slavery and prostitution were also banned. The new society may already begin now, as one is trying to destroy the old.

Many have been the assessments of the Taiping Revolution: all of colourful missionaries at the time condemned it as heresy (especially the redoubtable James Legge),¹⁷ although some missionaries attempted to correct the Taiping errors; critics – where they have paid serious attention to the religious core of the movement – have judged it as yet another manifestation of millenarianism, as fanatical totalitarianism, as a warmed-over version of Protestantism, as a manifestation of local popular religion, or as a new religion entirely (Boardman 1952; Jen 1973; Michael and Chang 1966; Reilly 2004; Spence 1996; Wagner 1982). None has to my knowledge connected it with the long and varied revolutionary tradition of Christianity. To a reader familiar with the Münster Revolution (1534-1535) or indeed Thomas Münzer and the Peasant Revolution (1524-1525), the accounts of the movement, its spectacular successes, its revolutionary doctrine, its innovative social and economic organisation – all of these have a remarkably similar ring. But is there a concrete link between the European form of this tradition and China? I suggest that may be such a link with the energetic Karl Gützlaff (1803-51), responsible for the translation of the Old Testament that formed the scriptural bedrock of the Taiping movement.¹⁸ Gützlaff and his Chinese Union, with its strong emphasis on indigenisation, were much criticised at the time (especially by James Legge and the London Missionary Society). But with their minimal requirements for baptism and their emphasis on extensive rather than intensive missionary work by Chinese converts, they ensured that fledging congregations arose among the villages they visited (notably among the Hakka) and wide distribution of the Bible. Gützlaff’s model was followed by the Basel Mission, which also had considerable success (Lutz and Lutz 1996; Lutz 2008). One of these Bibles, as we saw, came into the hands of Hong Xiuquan, and Christian congregations had arisen in the villages where he lived.

The key is that Gützlaff, although an independent missionary, had a background among the Moravian Brethren (Unitas Fratrum). I do not wish to overstress this connection, but it explains what many call Gützlaff's "eccentric" approach. Although Moravians trace their back to the Bohemian Reformer, Jan Hus (c. 1369-1415), their form was deeply influenced by the revival of the Brethren under the German Count Zinzendorf in the eighteenth century. Their radicalism lay in unique theological developments, focused on the blood and wounds of Jesus, and innovative communal organisation, which entailed an implicit criticism of the status quo. Communal life focused on simplicity and the sharing of goods, so that none would be rich or poor. Women had significant roles, while the sexes were segregated according to different ages. Each group had an overseer, with the focus on spiritual and bodily development. At the core of this life was Bible study, prayer, public confession of sins and mutual accountability. Along with this collective endeavour went an extraordinarily energetic missionary program that sought to build up bodies of local converts in places as remote as Greenland and Africa. Of course, by the nineteenth century, the Moravians had undergone numerous changes, not least being the alignment with the increasingly global reach of capitalism. But Gützlaff was heir to this tradition. In particular, he favoured more radical and communal interpretations of the Bible, the need for missionary work by local converts, and the independence from mainstream churches that was a hallmark of the Moravians.

Each of the features of the Taiping Revolution I have emphasised is also found in the revolutionary Christian tradition that Engels first identified and Kautsky outlined in such detail: the radical and heterodox interpretation of the Bible; the revolutionary challenge to the existing order that arose from such interpretation; a communal mode of living. Obviously, this revolutionary tradition was somewhat different from the earlier forms of Christianity introduced to China by the Nestorians in the seventh century CE, and then the Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries from the sixteenth century onwards. But let me return to the tension between old and new, which is given a unique twist with the Taiping revolutionaries. Christianity may have had an intermittent history in China from the seventh century onwards, but it was a form of Christianity that relied on imperial favour to flourish (when that favour was removed, it foundered). Not so with the Taiping revolutionaries. The form adapted and developed by Hong Xiuquan was distinctly new in a Chinese situation,

with its challenge to the imperial order itself. This rather different situation may be understood in a number of ways.

In some respects, the Taiping Revolution seemed to continue an age-old pattern in China. Indeed, it was one among a number of other movements at the time, such as Nian Rebellion in the north (1853-68) and Panthay Rebellion (1856-73) in the southwest, and the Dungan Revolt in the west (1862-77). In earlier centuries and even millennia, dynastic change had often involved peasant uprisings, at times by minority groups (the Taiping armies were initially made up of Hakka and Zhuang peoples). But these uprisings, when successful, would then institute another dynastic system that continued the patterns of the old. The challenge in these cases was to the particular dynasty, which had – it was assumed – veered off course and become corrupt. So a correction was needed, restoring a proper dynasty with emperors that held true to the “mandate of heaven.” In this way, the fundamentals of the dynastic system remained firmly in place. In some respects, the Taiping followed a similar pattern, with the later rise of its leader, Hong Xiuquan, to the status of an emperor in the old imperial capital of Nanjing.

Despite these similarities, the Taiping revolutionaries offered a profound innovation. They sought neither to gain independence for a region, nor to reinstate yet another imperial dynasty. The whole imperial order, with its Confucian ideology, was itself the problem. Their acts of deliberate destruction of the signs of imperial presence indicated a clear sense of their own innovation. Here it is worth noting that Hong Xiuquan stipulated that he was to be called nothing more than *zhu*, lord, for only Shangdi was to be called *di*. Subsequent studies have emphasised that the Taiping Revolution did mark a new moment in Chinese history, for it was the first “modern” revolution in China (Michael and Chang 1966, vol. 1). Indeed, for Samir Amin, the Taiping Revolution was the “ancestor of the ‘anti-feudal, anti-imperialist popular revolution’ as formulated later by Mao” (2013: 159). He argues that it was the first revolutionary strategy of peoples on the peripheries of capitalist imperialism, thereby becoming the model for modern anti-imperialist struggle. The resonances went deep into Chinese society, especially in areas where the Taiping held sway, undermining the structure of the Qing dynasty so that it could only totter along for a few decades more.¹⁹ Crucial for my argument is that this new approach was derived from a novel interpretation of the Bible and the reformulation of the revolutionary Christian tradition. The Taiping Revolution marks the arrival of that tradition in China.

Mao Zedong and the Taiping Revolution

The Chinese revolution will throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis (Marx 1853: 98).

So the Taiping veered towards the new, differing from the old pattern of overthrowing one imperial dynasty only to replace it with another. But what happens when we widen our scope to a global perspective? In that light, the revolution becomes part of a much older religious revolutionary tradition with its roots in ancient Southwest Asia and then Europe. The Taiping revolution is, therefore, also very much part of the old. However, the dialectic becomes enticingly complex when we turn to Mao's Zedong's engagement with the Taiping Revolution.

Most of Mao references to the Taiping movement appear in lists. Although the function of those lists varies, nearly all of them express a sense that the movement formed part of older tradition of revolutionary upheaval in Chinese history. For example, the Taiping Revolution sometimes appears as part of a long list of peasant uprisings that began in the distance past and culminated with the Taiping Revolution (Mao 1939a: 282). More often, the Taiping come at the beginning of a more recent list of movements from the middle of the nineteenth century, at the earliest moments of Chinese struggles against foreign colonial powers, such as Anti-opium War (1839-42), the Sino-Japanese War (1894), the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), the Revolutionary War of 1911, the war of the Northern Expedition in 1926-1927, the May Fourth Movement (1919), the struggle against the Japanese occupation, and then the agrarian communist revolution of which he was a part. The function of these more recent lists varies: as an example of a "just" war against foreign capitalist aggression occupation (Mao 1935: 101; 1939c: 71-72; 1939a: 288-89); as part of the long bourgeois-democratic revolution that will pass to a socialist revolution (Mao 1939b; 1939c; 1940: 333); as an indiscriminate anti-colonial struggle (Mao 1938a: 607); as yet another failure, however noble, that will not be repeated with the communist struggle (Mao 1938b: 328; 1939d: 47). For these lists, Mao does not distinguish between imperial resistance to foreign invasion (Anti-opium War), the activities of the Guomindang (Northern Expedition) and peasant revolutionary movements.

However, on a couple of occasions the nature of the list becomes more focused. Here Mao distinguishes between national struggles against foreign oppression, in which all national classes unite in the struggle (Opium Wars, Boxer Rebellion, Sino-Japanese War), and situations in which the international and national ruling class unite forces and oppress the masses. On these occasions, the masses rise up to resist such oppression. Now the list is more focused, identifying only the Taiping Revolution and the Republican Revolution of 1911, before mentioning the long struggle of the communist revolution in terms of key moments, such as the 1925-27 Revolution (Mao 1938b: 331).²⁰ On these occasions, the role of the Taiping Revolution shifts, from a focus on the way they were part of an older tradition to a sense that they signal a new departure of exploited peasants and workers against the ruling class.

Yet even when he acknowledges the importance of the Taiping Revolution, Mao is wary. Part of his wariness arises from the need to retain some form of innovation for the communists.²¹ Thus, while the Taiping were “progressive,” they were progressive in the sense that they were seeking to overthrow what was still a feudal society under foreign oppression (Mao 1938b: 331). By contrast, the communists offered a different type of progressiveness, in the context of a capitalism and its class conflicts. Another part of his wariness was due to the fact that the Taiping Revolution was deeply formed by foreign influences. Indeed, this was part of the troubled engagement with foreign influences on China, the subject of so much debate at the time. Aware of all that was negative of the Chinese imperial system, he tried to work through a way of appropriating foreign influences while constantly transforming them in light of Chinese conditions (Mao 1917: 132; 1938c: 538-39).

The tension between old and new, between radical religion and modern socialism has become complex indeed, so much so that simplistic characterisations (stressing one or the other, with the associated risks) has become impossible. I chose to focus on the Taiping Revolution, since it breaks with a European tradition in which a clear difference operates, with religious revolutionaries preceding modern socialism. Instead, the prior revolutionary tradition in China was of a very different order, one that did not partake of the Christian revolutionary tradition. The question then is how they related to the prior history of uprisings in Chinese history. Were they yet another peasant revolt, challenging the imperial order, or were they harbingers of a new order, in response to foreign oppressions, capitalism and colonialism, if not of

a bourgeois revolutionary process? Or were they the first signal of modern revolutions by oppressed peasants, which would finally come to fruition with the communist revolution? Many of these tensions appear in Mao's efforts to come to terms with the Taiping revolutionaries. For him, they were part of the old revolutionary tradition, either an ancient pattern of peasant revolutions or a more recent one, a movement from the nineteenth century of the oppressed against the ruling class and as the result of foreign influences in China. Yet that modern movement also had a distinctly new dimension, its innovation signalled by that very same feature: the uprising of the poor and oppressed classes against their exploiting overlords. When he does acknowledge such innovation, the Taiping Revolution stands at the head of that process – precisely the movement that arose under the inspiration of a foreign, revolutionary Christian influence. Where does all this leave the Marxism he embraced? It had a “Western” provenance similar to the revolutionary religious tradition that appeared with the Taiping revolutionaries. It too was the result of foreign influence that was transformed in and shook up China. Like the Taiping, Mao's Marxism broke radically with the past – in all its senses – while trying to transform the past; or, Marxism could only enact its innovation by being transformed in light of the older Chinese traditions.

So rather than an argument for the *Aufhebung* of older religious radicalism in light of Marxism, in which the religion in question is both annulled and thoroughly reshaped in unexpected ways, I would like to close with a slightly different proposal: by now it should be clear that the dialectic of old and new is not a problem that Marxism has created for the first time. Indeed, a consideration of former revolutionary movements such as the Taiping soon reveals that each one has constantly faced this struggle in its own way. Each genuinely revolutionary movement (rather than one of restoration), each revolutionary period feels that it offers something distinctly new, something that has not been experienced before. Yet it must continually engage with the old. I mean here not the old order that the revolution seeks to sweep away, but the heritage of former revolutionary movements, which provide inspiration and – usually – a host of “failed” and even “catastrophic”²² examples that the current revolution seeks to overcome and thereby become the first “genuine” revolution. But we may go further, following Žižek's reflections on the absence of a “right” moment for revolution. He quotes Rosa Luxemburg to suggest that the possibility of thorough revolutionary upheaval relies

upon a number of prior and “premature” revolutions, which, although they may have failed, provide the conditions for an as yet to be achieved successful revolution (2014: 190-91). Let me take this even further, now with Žižek’s observations concerning Lenin’s engagement with Hegel and the influence on the Russian Revolution. Each revolution is “premature,” for the revolutionary movement acts when the time is not yet ripe.²³ The reason is that “this very ‘premature’ intervention would radically change the ‘objective’ relationship of forces itself, within which the initial situation appeared ‘premature’” (Žižek 2001b, 144; see also 2012: 120, 217, 438). In other words, the criteria for determining what is premature and ripe are part of what one seeks to change. One does not follow the prescriptions of established stages, of a correct path to revolution, for that is to remain within the coordinates of the world as it is. Instead, the subjective intervention of a revolution changes the objective coordinates and establishes a new order, an order that is not so much an external reality but is created through the revolutionary act.

Thus far, I have written with the implicit assumption that a genuine or successful revolutionary act functions in such a way – as engagement with the old, as premature, as recreating the very coordinates by which one understands revolution itself. However, each revolutionary moment is characterised by such a pattern, whether they have “failed” or “succeeded.” So the prior revolutionary tradition – which is often distinctly religious – follows this pattern. Rather than some sense of gradual progress, or of keeping the revolutionary flame alive, or of delayed anticipation of final success in light of a series of “failures,” the revolutionary tradition itself is constituted by this struggle at each revolutionary moment. And at each moment, it recreates its precursors as a revolutionary tradition to which it now must relate.

References

- Amin, Samir (2013) “Forerunners of the Contemporary World: The Paris Commune (1871) and the Taiping Revolution (1851–1864),” *International Critical Thought*, 3 (2):159-64.
- Blissett, Luther (2004 [1999]) Q, London: Arrow.
- Bloch, Ernst (1969) *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*, Volume 2, *Ernst Bloch Werkausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Boardman, Eugene (1952) *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851–1864*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- Boer, Roland (2007) *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*, Historical Materialism Book Series. Leiden and Chicago: Brill and Haymarket.
- Boer, Roland (2009) *Criticism of Religion: On Marxism and Theology II*, Historical Materialism Book Series. Leiden and Chicago: Brill and Haymarket.
- Boer, Roland (2014a) "All Things Are in Common": Theology and Politics in Luther Blissett's Q," *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory*, 141:139-59.
- Boer, Roland (2014b) *In The Vale of Tears: On Marxism and Theology V*, Leiden: Brill.
- Boer, Roland (2014c) "Karl Kautsky's Forerunners of Modern Socialism," *Chiasma: A Site for Thought*, 1 (1). Available at <http://westernchiasma.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/chiasma-boer.pdf>. Accessed March 12, 2015.
- Engels, Friedrich (1850a [1973]) "Der deutsche Bauernkrieg," in *Marx Engels Werke*, volume 7, Berlin: Dietz, 327-413.
- Engels, Friedrich (1850b [1978]) "The Peasant War in Germany," in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, volume 10, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 397-482.
- Engels, Friedrich (1894-95a [1972]) "Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums," in *Marx Engels Werke*, volume 22, Berlin: Dietz, 447-73.
- Engels, Friedrich (1894-95b [1990]) "On the History of Early Christianity," in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, volume 27, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 445-69.
- Fogeleman, Aaron Spencer (2008) *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and Radical Religion in Early America*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jen Youwen (1973) *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kautsky, Karl (1897) *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, trans. by J. L. Mulliken and E. G. Mulliken, London: Fisher and Unwin.
- Kautsky, Karl (1895-97a [1976]) *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus I: Kommunistische Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, Berlin: Dietz.
- Kautsky, Karl (1895-97b [1976]) *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus II: Der Kommunismus in der deutschen Reformation*, Berlin: Dietz.
- Kautsky, Karl, and Paul Lafargue (1922 [1977]) *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus III: Die beiden ersten grossen Utopisten*, Stuttgart: Dietz.
- Liebman, Marcel (1975 [1973]) *Leninism under Lenin*. London: Merlin.
- Lindemann, Hugo, and Morris Hillquit (1922 [1977]) *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus IV*, Stuttgart: Dietz.
- Lunacharsky, Anatoly Vasil'evich (1911) *Religiia i sotsializm: Tom 2*, Moscow: Shipovnik.
- Lunacharsky, Anatoly Vasil'evich (1985) *Religiia i prosveshchenie*, ed by V. N. Kuznetsova, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia.
- Lutz, Jessie Gregory (2008) *Opening China: Karl F. A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations, 1827-1852*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Lutz, Jessie Gregory, and R. Ray Lutz (1996) "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union," in Daniel Bays (ed.) *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 269-91.
- Luxemburg, Rosa (1905a [1970]) "Socialism and the Churches," in Mary-Alice Waters (ed.) *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 131-52.
- Luxemburg, Rosa (1905b [1982]) *Kirche und Sozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main: Stimme-Verlag.
- Mao Zedong (1917 [1992]) "Letter to Li Jingxi (August 23, 1917)," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 1, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 131-36.
- Mao Zedong (1926 [1994]) "Some Points for Attention in Commemorating the Paris Commune," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 2, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 365-68
- Mao Zedong (1928 [1995]) "Resolutions of the Sixth Congress of Party Representatives from the Fourth Red Army," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 3, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 122-27.

- Mao Zedong (1935 [1999]) "On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 5, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 86-102.
- Mao Zedong (1938a [2004]) "On Dialectical Materialism," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 6, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 573-667.
- Mao Zedong (1938b [2004]) "On Protracted War" in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 6, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 319-89.
- Mao Zedong (1938c [2004]) "On the New Stage," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 6, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 458-541.
- Mao Zedong (1939a [2005]) "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 7, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 279-306.
- Mao Zedong (1939b [2005]) "The May Fourth Movement," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 7, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 66-68.
- Mao Zedong (1939c [2005]) "Speech at the Meeting in Yan'an in Commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the May Fourth Movement," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 7, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 69-79.
- Mao Zedong (1939d [2005]) "Women, Unite," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 7, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 44-49.
- Mao Zedong (1940 [2005]) "On New Democracy," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, volume 7, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 330-69.
- Marx, Karl (1853 [1975]) "Revolutions in China and Europe," in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, volume 12, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 93-100.
- Marx, Karl (1891a [1973]) "Kritik des Gothaer Programms," in *Marx Engels Werke*, volume 19, Berlin: Dietz, 11-32.
- Marx, Karl (1891b [1989]) "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, volume 24, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 75-99.
- Michael, Franz, and Chung-li Chang (1966) *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, 3 volumes, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Müntzer, Thomas (1988) *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, trans. by Peter Matheson, Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Petterson, Christina (2014) *The Missionary, the Catechist and the Hunter: Foucault, Protestantism and Colonialism*, Leiden: Brill.
- Platt, Stephen R. (2012) *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West and the Taiping Civil War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Reilly, Thomas (2004) *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Spence, Jonathan (1996) *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, Hammersmith: HarperCollins.
- Vvedensky, Aleksandr Ivanovich (1925 [1985]) "Otvetnoe slovo A. I. Vvedensky," in V. N. Kuznetsova (ed.) *Religia i prosveshchenie*, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 214-23.
- Wagner, Rudolf (1982) *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion*, Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000) *The Fragile Absolute, or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2001a) *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* London: Verso
- Žižek, Slavoj (2001b) *On Belief*. London: Routledge.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2003) *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: MIT.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2009) From Job to Christ: A Pauline Reading of Chesterton. In *Paul Among the Philosophers*, edited by John D. Caputo and Linda M. Alcoff. Bloomington: Indiana University, 39-58.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2012) *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2014) *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso.

Notes

¹ In using such terminology, I do not mean the tensions between the old order and the new that a revolution seeks to establish, but the tension between former revolutionary moments and the current moment.

² I do not argue here a number of assumptions that I have argued elsewhere: religion is as much a materialist phenomenon as an idealist one (emerging surprisingly from Marx's own deliberations on the fetish); a religion like Christianity is profoundly ambivalent politically, thus becoming reactionary with extraordinary ease and at the same time fostering revolutions that undermine such reaction. This latter point goes to the very core of Christianity's ideology and organisation (Boer 2014b).

³ Without acknowledging Engels's own struggle, the efforts by Badiou and Žižek to develop a materialist grace may be seen in a similar way – an effort to revitalise a European Left (Boer 2007: 335-90; Boer 2009: 155-80).

⁴ Engels's early and somewhat flawed study had profound ramifications, developed further by Karl Kautsky and Ernst Bloch, and resonating in our own day with the novel Q (Bloch 1969; Blissett 2004; Boer 2014a).

⁵ Kautsky shared this argument with Rosa Luxemburg (1905a; 1905b).

⁶ Thus, Kautsky's long study – and the work of those who completed his project (Lindemann and Hillquit 1922) – runs through almost two millennia of European examples.

⁷ I follow the Chinese convention in calling it a revolution (Jen 1973), rather than efforts to water it down as a "rebellion," (Michael and Chang 1966; Wagner 1982), "restoration" (Reilly 2004: 5), or even – in a misguided comparison with the United States – a "civil war" (Platt 2012). Or rather, the aspects of rebellion and civil war must be seen under the rubric of revolution.

⁸ Unhappy with this earlier version, Gützlaff made numerous revisions, but it was this version that the Taiping used.

⁹ The *Taiping Heavenly Chronicle* (*Taiping tianri*) records part of Hong's vision: "The Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God, ordered that three classes of books be put out and indicated this to the Sovereign, saying, 'This class of books consists of the records which have been transmitted from that former time when I descended into the world, performing miracles and instituting the commandments. These books are pure and without error. And the books of the second class are the accounts which have been transmitted from the time when your Elder Brother, Christ, descended into the world, performing miracles, sacrificing his life for the remission of sins, and doing other deeds. These books also are pure and without error. But the books of the other class are those transmitted from Confucius ... these books contain extremely numerous errors and faults, so that you were harmed by studying them'" (Michael and Chang 1966, vol 2: 56-57).

¹⁰ The tension between revelation and scripture became a source and means of factional struggle some years later in Nanjing. The remaining visionary, Yang Xiuqing, known as the Comforter and Holy Spirit, began to use his visions to undermine Hong and even challenge the authority of the Bible itself. Yang forbade the publishing of any more Bibles, declaring that it contained errors. Hong managed to best Yang (the latter and followers literally lost their heads), but it forced Hong to begin a process of rewriting the more offensive passages in the Bible, especially those dealing with sex, alcohol and dubious acts in relation to parents – of which there are many in the Bible (Spence 1996: 210-45).

¹¹ Reilly offers a useful discussion of the political implications in a Chinese context of the New Testament term, kingdom of Heaven (Reilly 2004: 104-15).

¹² Here I follow Reilly's careful study (2004: 19-53, 78-100), which includes a detailed study of the adoption of this translation after much controversy that goes back to Matteo Ricci.

¹³ As the *Taiping Imperial Declaration*, composed between 1844 and 1845, put it: "By referring to the Old Testament [*Jiuyizhao Shengshu*] we learn that in early ages the Supreme God [*Huang Shangdi*] descended on Mount Sinai and in his own hand he wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, which he gave to Moses, saying, 'I am the High Lord [*Shangzhu*], the Supreme God; you men of the world must on no account set up images resembling anything in heaven above or on earth below, and bow down and worship them'. Now you people of the world who set up images and bow down and worship them are in absolute defiance of the Supreme God's expressed will. ... How extremely foolish you are to let your minds be so deceived by the demon!' (Michael and Chang 1966, vol. 2: 41).

¹⁴ Compare the slogan of Thomas Münzer, based on Acts 2 and 4: "It is an article of our creed, and one which we wish to realise, that all things are in common [*omnia sunt communia*], and should be distributed as occasion requires, according to the several necessities of all. Any prince, count, or baron who, after being earnestly reminded of this truth, shall be unwilling to accept it, is to be beheaded or hanged." (Kautsky 1897: 130; 1895-97b: 67; see further Müntzer 1988).

¹⁵ As *The Land System of the Heavenly Divinity* states: "The whole empire is the universal family of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God. When all the people in the empire will not take anything as their own but submit all things to the Supreme Lord, then the Lord will make use of them, and in the universal family of the empire, every place will be equal and every individual well-fed and clothed. This is the intent of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God, in specially commanding the true Sovereign of Taiping to save the world" (Michael and Chang 1966, vol. 2: 314).

¹⁶ Such segregation appears in not a few radical European movements, such as the Moravian Brethren (Fogeleman 2008).

¹⁷ This should come as no surprise, for not only have religious revolutionary leaders been dismissed as crazed heretics (Thomas Münzer being the best known example), but also many examples of the "indigenisation" or "contextualisation" have been decried as heresies by the establishment. One example among many is the "Habakkuk" movement in Greenland (1788- 1793), which the Danish missionaries dismissed as a heresy and crushed (Petterson 2014).

¹⁸ Reilly's observation carries more weight that he realises, for he does not deal with Gützlaff's Moravian background: "The German missionary's impact on the Taiping far exceeded that of all other mission efforts combined" (Reilly 2004: 63).

¹⁹ It is telling that the revolutionaries involved in the 1911 revolution consciously invoked the Taiping, with some letting their hair grow long like their revolutionary forebears. Sun Yatsen was known by the nickname of Hong Xiuquan.

²⁰ Tellingly, his references become international at this point, with mentions of the February and October Revolutions in Russia and numerous revolutions in Central and South America.

²¹ This reticence does not prevent him from suggesting the communists learn from the Taiping revolutionaries in terms of military organisation. Thus, instead of mercenary armies, the communists sought to follow the example of using militias, in which everyone in the movement was involved (Mao 1926: 367; 1928: 127).

²² By "catastrophic" I mark Žižek's perpetual concern with the turn of even a successful revolution into its nightmarish other, signalled above all by Stalin's "nightmare." Indeed, for Žižek, no revolution has thus far succeeded, succumbing in some way to "catastrophe."

²³ Or, as Liebman puts it, "Without wishing to underestimate the weight of economic conditions in deciding the course of political and social evolution, one must take account of the evidence: when, acting 'in the direction of history,' that is, in the narrow margin that social reality allows to human freedom, an individual possessing exceptional powers intervenes, then facts, institutions and states may all find themselves topsy-turvy" (Liebman 1975, 147).