DISCUSSION:

THOMISM AND MARXISM-LENINISM

The similarities between Thomism and Marxism-Leninism are many and sometimes very striking. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that no other two contemporary philosophical schools have so much in common. This is, of course, denied by Most Marxist-Leninists, and even those who did study Thomism, like B. E. Byxovskij, violently deny any sort of similarity. Yet it is a fact that the majority of studies done on Marxist-Leninist philosophy have been made by Thomists— which could best be accounted for by their close kinship. And a glance at a list of the major doctrines held by the two schools easily convinces one that the similarity is not just superficial. Here are a few examples.

Both schools uphold epistemological realism. That is one common point. Both, also, defend a doctrine of absolute truth and the capacity to know some aspects of reality definitely. It also seems that there is, on both sides, a profound distaste for phenomenalism as an ontological position; in opposition to phenomenalism they both believe in some sort of substratum carrying the phenomena, by whatever name. The doctrine concerning the status and the role of philosophy is basically the same: both Thomists and Marxist-Leninists think that philosophy is more than the logic and methodology of science, while at the same time maintaining that philosophy must make use of the results of science. It is asserted on both sides that, while there is nothing in consciousness before sense-experience, all experience is not simply sensual. There are also many common points in anthropology: man is conceived not in the Cartesian fashion, as a conjunction of two things, but as one substance; it is true that the Thomists add their peculiar and difficult doctrine of the 'partial substantality' of the soul, which is denied by the Marxist-Leninists, but this is a rather secondary aspect. In any case, both schools are categorically opposed to what the Marxist-Leninists call 'vulgar materialism': the mind is not a body and does not have a single property of bodies. Finally, there seems
DISCUSSION

to be a striking similarity between the Thomistic concept of potency and that of dialectics in Marxism-Leninism. Both are used wherever we meet with serious ontological difficulties, as in the problem of movement.

II

There is almost no understanding of this similarity on the part of the Marxist-Leninists. Many of them, perhaps the majority, know very little about Thomism. This is not entirely their fault, since Thomistic philosophy is, at present, suffering an eclipse. Very often Marxist-Leninists will identify Thomist philosophy with Thomist theology (which is a different thing) and both with Catholic theology, or even with the current religious beliefs of Catholics, conceived as a monolithic system imposed by some powerful Roman central authority. Since they themselves are militant philosophers, believing strongly that every philosopher is a kind of politician and propagandist, they quite naturally imagine that a similar attitude is assumed by the Thomists. The result of this is that even those few who do devote some study to Thomist doctrines often seriously misunderstand them. They search above all for political or religious implications, and if they find some, they tend to interpret everything else from the political or religious point of view. One classical instance of such a misunderstanding is the latest article by Byxovskij in Kommunist. Here is a characteristic quotation from it:

Konečno, dla tomista (a o tomistax Boxenskogo poučat' necégo – on sam k nim prinadžit) istina zaranee zadana. Dlia nìx ravnenie na svjažennoe pisanie, otcov cerkvi, papskie encikliki, na teologičeskie dogmy – vysší zakon filosofskoj subordinacii.3

(Naturally, for a Thomist (and it is not necessary to teach Bocheński about Thomists – as he himself is one of them) the truth is given in advance. For them, the orientation to Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the Pontifical Encyclicals, theological dogmas is the supreme law of philosophical subordination.)

This is obviously false. No such doctrine has ever been defended by any Thomist known to me, far less by myself, however I might be classified.4 As this is not a personal polemic but an attempt to clarify the relations between two schools of thought, I shall state only the following:

(1) It is not true that for the Thomist istina zaraneé dana – the truth is given in advance. I do not know a single Thomist who would assert such