portance of the pacifist position since the atomic bomb has been developed. I think he rightly sees that the ethical and moral problems are exactly the same as they were. It matters little how one kills; the victim is just as dead. It may shock the sensitivity of men to kill many but if it is wrong to kill many with an atomic bomb it would be just as wrong to kill one with a stone axe. In fact the position of non-participation advocated by Muste might cause a more horrible death by starvation. His so called non-violence may become more violent than war. That Gandhi was successful against the British is no reason that the Russians would react the same way.

A position of absolute pacifism allows no grounds for maintaining even a police force, since there is no real difference in kind between war and police action. Their position logically results in anarchy. Perhaps the most serious criticism is that they fail to recognize the sinfulness of man. The believe that if we just assume that the enemy will react favorably he will. They isolate war from other ethical problems and ignore the fact that war is actually a symptom of deeper trouble. By their total absorption in the question of war they neglect the deeper underlying causes of war.

It seems to me that we must recognize the presence of sin in man and that it can be done without seeing that there is also good. Since man is so often sinful there must be some coercion to keep one man from injuring his fellows. This is just as true between nations as it is between individuals. If one nation oppresses another a Christian nation must, in order to express love of neighbor, help protect the oppressed. This does not relieve us of our obligation to the enemy nation. We are obligated to treat them in such a way as to reclaim them to a useful place in the world community after they have been prevented from oppressing another. We must not seek revenge.

THD. MLKP-MBU: Box 112, folder 14A.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

Notes on American Capitalism

[20 February–4 May 1951?]
[Chester, Pa.?]

King wrote these two paragraphs, probably as notes to himself, during the Christianity and Society course. He criticizes aspects of Marxist thought but asserts that “capitalism has seen its best days.”

Will Karl Marx, the German philosophy and economists, stated that capitalism carries the seed of its own destruction. There is an obvious fallacy in that statement. The fallacy is that it is limited to capitalism leaving the impression that other social movements do not carry the seed of their own destruction. The actual fact is that every social institution carries the seed of its own destruction; its survival depends on the way the seed is nourished. Now after admitting that there is a fallacy in Marx’ statement, do we find any truth therein? It is my opinion that there is. I am convinced that
capitalism has seen its best days in American, and not only in America, but in the entire world. It is a well known fact that no social institut can survive when it has outlived its usefulness. This, capitalism has done. It has failed to meet the needs of the masses.

We need only to look at the underlying developments of our society. There is a definite revolt by, what Marx calls, “the preletarian”, against the bourgeoisie. Every where we turn we are faced with stricks and a demand for socialized medicine. In fact, what is more socialistic than the income tax, the T.V.A., or the N.R.B. “What will eventually happen is this, labor will become so power (this was certainly evidenced in the recent election) that she will be able to place a president in the White House. This will inevitably bring about a nationalization of industry. That will be the end of capitalism. I am not saying that there is a conscious move toward socialism, not even by labor, the move is certainly unconscious. But there is a definite move away from capitalism, whether we conceive of it as conscious or unconscious Capitalism finds herself like a losing football team in the last quarter trying all types of tactics to survive.

AD. MLKP-MBU: Box 113, folder 21.

"Jacques Maritain"

[20 February–4 May 1951]
[Chester, Pa.]

King delivered this presentation for Smith’s course Christian Social Philosophy, which surveyed the ethical and social thought of Christianity from the era of the New Testament to the 1950s. King explains that Jacques Maritain, a Catholic theologian, was critical of modern philosophy’s move away from theology toward agnosticism and atheism. “Maritain feels that atheism was one of the causes for the rise of communism rather than a mere consequence,” King writes. He insists that although Maritain did not equate Christianity with democracy, “the only valid assumption that one can draw from Maritain’s conclusions on democracy is that he sees it as the nearest political approximation of Christian principles.” Smith made no comments on the paper and gave King an A for the course.

1. “Each student will prepare a paper, which will be presented orally in class. These reports should be 45 minutes long. On the day of the report, the student will submit a two-page, typed summary of his report to each member of the class.” Maritain was listed as one of the “representative proponents” under the section heading “Contemporary Responses to the Social Crisis” (Kenneth L. Smith, Syllabus for Christian Social Philosophy II, 10 February–4 May 1951, CSKC).
2. Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) was a French Catholic theologian. King also examined Maritain’s theology in an essay at Boston University. See “Contemporary Continental Theology,” 13 September 1951–15 January 1952, MLKP-MBU: Box 112, folder 14; to be published in volume II.