

COMMUNISM AND CHRISTIANITY - PART 1

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John 8:31,32; 2 Timothy 3:1; Luke 21:26

The world of today is divided into two great camps: The East and the West. Behind these two camps there are two great ideas: Communism and Christianity. Behind these two ideas rise the shadows of two great personalities: Karl Marx and Jesus Christ.

Both of them come to the world with a philosophy of life and a program of human welfare. Both of them claim to offer the elixir of life, the panacea of all our problems. Both of them demand our total allegiance. There is no middle ground between them, for history has reached a point where there are only two candidates from which we must choose.

Let us look at the least known of these two controversial figures.

Karl Marx was the son of a Jewish lawyer whose name was Mordecai. He was born in Germany on May 5, 1818. His father held a high position in the Prussian government and he was raised in what we would call comfortable circumstances.

When he was six years old, his parents were baptized into the Christian Church. However, the best available scholarship takes the position that their conversion was a matter of political expediency and social convenience. Religion apparently never played an important part in their lives.

This cynical attitude of his parents, who submitted to Christian baptism simply to improve their social and financial position, undoubtedly had something to do with the contempt with which Karl Marx later regarded religion of any kind.

As a student in the universities of Bonn and Berlin he showed signs of intellectual genius. But,

because of emotional instability, his education was prolonged unduly. When at last he left the University he vacillated between a number of jobs, usually in journalism. He became more and more involved in politics. For a few years Marx wandered through France and Belgium studying various political ideologies, until in 1848, the year of the Revolution in France, he went back to Germany hoping to inspire revolt there. He was unsuccessful and in 1849, when the Revolutionary tide that had threatened to overwhelm the entire continent began to subside, he crossed the English Channel into London which was his home until he died.

For thirty-five years he lived there in grinding poverty. Sometimes, because he had no clothes to wear, he was confined to the few shabby rooms he called his home. During one five-year span three of his children died of malnutrition. Too poor to give them a decent burial, he made coffins out of old orange crates and laid them to rest in Potters Field.

The vast majority of his time was spent in the reading room of the British Museum. There, beneath the high glass dome of the Library, he laboriously waded through the accumulated debris of a thousand dead philosophies and social schemes, shrewdly weaving them into one diabolical whole. In the eighteenth year of his work, he completed the ponderous volume ADas Kapital@ which the Communists proudly call their Bible.

It was a poorly written work and when it was first published it was received Awith a loud silence.@ But within its covers were hidden the seeds of a world revolution which finally burst upon humanity with incredible force in March of 1917 when a Red wave swept down upon the villages of Russia.

To be sure, the blunders of Marx were many. He was often depressed, easily irritated and he would countenance no opposition. But he served Communism with a devotion that was enormous.

AHe knew where he wanted to go and he knew where he wanted the world to go.@

So while it seemed that when he died he had died in vain, and that his name had been written in sand and would soon be forgotten, today he is venerated by millions. To them he is the long-awaited Messiah. One third of the earth lies under the ominous shadow of the sign of the sickle. 800,000,000 people have become captive to this treacherous system. And, the end is not yet!

Why has Communism made such fantastic gains in the brief span of forty-five years? Certainly one reason is

The Variety of Its Appeal.

Quite naturally one of its greatest appeals is to the deluded and despairing poor.

One of the pamphlets published by the party in Great Britain is How I Became a Communist. It is mainly a collection of testimonies from converts. The theme throughout is one of privation and want, highlighted by long periods of unemployment, giving birth at last to poverty's step-children: fear, frustration and futility. At the very depths of their bewilderment and despair these people came in contact with the party and suddenly, according to their testimonies, they were given enlightenment and hope.

In his fine book, Communism and Christian Faith, Ingli James quotes from this pamphlet the testimony of a young girl who had been perplexed and distressed from childhood by poverty, class distinctions and the constant threat of war. Then she joined the party and Afound what I had been seeking for all my life. I found at last that all of the why's and wherefore's had been answered.@"

Alt is sad,@" Dr. James points out, Athat the poor should be deceived by error in that fashion, but we shall not deal effectively with that situation until we feel that it is far sadder that they should have been allowed to exist in conditions that gave error its chance.@"

And then Communism also makes an appeal to the disillusioned rich.

One of Karl Marx's most astonishing discoveries was that many of his early and most devoted followers came from the ranks of the privileged. These were people who enjoyed economic security, but were often disillusioned and hungry for some meaning to life.

This strange phenomenon has not changed. Many of Communism's most zealous disciples are garnered from the ranks of the disillusioned rich who have experienced the satiation of pure materialism with no real satisfaction. They have discovered the shallowness of high society and have grown weary of the cynicism of those who have every material advantage, but whose life is empty and without purpose.

They are fascinated by the reckless daring of the Communist's schemes. Its secretive methods offer a new excitement. By pouring their money into this A great humanitarian cause@ they are able to unburden their consciences so long weighted down with guilt as they tried in vain to justify their reckless squandering of wealth in the face of desperate poverty on every side. And believe me, to the guilt-ridden conscience of the disillusioned rich, Communism makes a great appeal. However, its most devastating appeal is not made to the disillusioned rich or the deluded and despairing poor, but to

The idealistic youth.

Eager youngsters are anxious to build a better world. They quickly grow impatient with the social and economic iniquities they see about them. They are shocked by the apathy of their elders who so very often sit in stolid, stony silence, never raising as much as a whisper against the evil that is all around them.

Idealistic youth cannot countenance such inertia. If the faith of their fathers does not move their fathers to action, then they will seek a new and more challenging faith. If the religion their elders profess leaves them frigidly phlegmatic in the face of gross injustices, impetuous youth will turn

to some other religion whose flaming passion will Afire their hearts and nerve their arms@ for action.

Thus you see one of the reasons for Communism=s strength--the variety of its appeal--reaching out for the heart of the deluded and despairing poor, the disillusioned rich and the idealistic young. A second source of its strength lies in

The Validity of Many of Its Charges.

Let us never put ourselves in the untenable position of seeking to justify the tyranny and rottenness of the Ruling class as it was in Russia and still is in many parts of our world.

Under Peter the Great, there developed in Russia a system of serfdom in which a man owned neither his body or soul, his wife or family, let alone his land. The result was unspeakable squalor. Tyrannical landlords here everywhere and one did not dare to raise his voice in protest against things as they were, lest for that Acrime@ he be sent shuffling off to the salt mines of Siberia.

Likewise, there is abroad in the world today a kind of capitalism which is almost totally unknown to us here in America where we look with pride upon our system of enlightened free enterprise, APrivilege demands responsibility.@ Thus we have our profit-sharing plans, sick leave, paid vacations, retirement programs, etc.

But in many sectors you will find the privileged few feel no sense of responsibility whatever toward the underprivileged masses. They sit in a kind of careless calm amid their great wealth and power, not only rejecting the hungry cries of those who they have exploited, but actually mocking their struggles.

They live in a way that is morally rotten. If we do not bring some Christian enlightenment into the darkness which they have brought to their people, one day the Communists will stick their

finger into the festering mess and like a running sore, it will flood the world with the accumulated hatred and bitterness of a thousand years of tyranny and rottenness.

A second criticism the Communists make is against the corruption of the Church.

Again, we know little of this in America. But one only need go into such lands as Italy, Spain and South America to understand what the Communists mean when they call religion Athe opiate of the people.@ There you will find magnificent cathedrals sending their gold-gilt spires high into the air, but they are a million miles from the people and their real spiritual needs.

In many cases (as it was in Russia) the church gains its support from the existing government and thus must bow its neck before its paymaster. In Russia the church had become so corrupt it allowed its priests to become spies for the state and thus actually betrayed the very people it should have shepherded and served.

A dead religion cloaked beneath Asilken robes, glittering altars and chanted liturgies@ is the opium of the people, for there is nothing quite so corrupt as corrupt religion. In so far as he raised his voice against it, Karl Marx was right.

Another valid charge leveled by the Communist is against the ignorance, privation and exploitation of the masses.

Extremes provoke extremes. In Russia, under Peter the Great, there were the grossest kind of ignorance, poverty and plundering the human mind can imagine. The same is true of China and many other Asiatic and South American countries today. Is it any wonder these people welcome Communism as the promised hope of a better life? It is as natural for them to do so as it is for a drowning man to clutch at a straw.

These, then, are some of the valid criticisms made by Communism. The fact that it so vigorously attacks these evils is the second reason for its rapid growth. To many people in the world, Communism is as logical as Atwo and two make four.@

A third source of its strength lies in

The Virtue of Real Accomplishments.

To be intellectually honest we must recognize that wherever Communism has gone, it has made some genuine improvements. Compared to the achievements of our American way of life they seem rather meager, but compared to what existed before, they would seem to mark the arrival of the Millennium.

Dr. James Clarke, Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary, sums it up in this way:

AWe should never forget the thousand years which preceded the Russian Revolution. The forty-five years since are but a hand span. Yet in that time, hope for a decent life has been brought to millions.

AA multitude of disciples have been stirred to prodigious effort. The Russian worker has now more work, better wages and fewer hours than he ever had before. Although the population is a mixture of many races, the color line has been practically eliminated.

ARecreational facilities, never before enjoyed by the masses, are now provided. Mothers working in the factories are given prenatal care that is admirable. The reformatory system for civil criminals is recognized as one of the most efficient in the world. The man who works with his hands now has access to culture, opportunity and promotion, of which he never would have dreamed in pre-revolution times.

ANow I am well aware of the price that has been paid for these advancements: the price of political slavery, mass murder and a reign of terror. But let us be wise enough to recognize the fact that we will never be able to cope with the

Communist threat unless we are alert to its strengths as well as its weaknesses.@

These then are the reasons for its great appeal and power behind its rapid march across the world:
The Variety of its Appeal. The Validity of Many of its Charges. The Virtue of Real Accomplishments Against all of these more or less positive factors I put one great negative factor:

The Viciousness of its Basic Principles

Therein lies the real test of its value. What does Communism really teach?

God

Look first of all at its teaching about God. Karl Marx said: ACommunism begins when Atheism begins.@ Lenin declared that AReligion is the opiate of the people. Atheism is an integral part of Marxism.@ At a students convention held in Liege, France, a manifesto was issued which stated:

AWhat we wish for, we revolutionaries, is by the annihilation of all religion and the church, to arrive at the negation of God.@

In his splendid treatise, Recent Political Thought, Francis W. Coker makes the following analysis of Communism=s attitude towards the idea of God:

AThe Communists may seem to be interested mainly in economic affairs, but they are equally concerned with religion because they consider it to be inconsistent with Communism and, indeed, a definite obstacle to the realization of their program. They renounce all religion for themselves and seek to destroy the religious faith of others. Members of the Communist Party are pledged to Atheism and the constitution disenfranchises priests and ministers of all sects.@

This then is Communism=s conclusion about God: He does not exist.

Man

Next in line of importance to a man's idea of God is Communism's idea of man himself. Everything else in life is based upon these two conclusions. We know what Communism says about God. Let us now take a look at its teaching about man. Dr. Clarke sums it up in a sentence:

AHe is an animal without a soul.@

Instead of being a little lower than the angels, he is conceived as being a little higher than the ants.

Carl Marx put it this way,

AMan is a child of hunger. His only spontaneous movement is to
get food, satisfaction, comfort and wealth.@

There you have it. In the eyes of Communism man is a soulless piece of animated plumbing whose only concern is for

the satisfaction of meat,

the ecstasy of sex,

the security of money

and the warmth of comfort.

Upon these two initial conclusions, the conclusion that there is no God and that man is an animal without a soul, Communism builds the balance of its diabolical philosophy.

Sin and Salvation

The traditional views of sin and salvation have no meaning for the Communist. If there is no God then it is impossible to transgress against Him. To a Communist sin is anything that stands in the way of the revolution. If man is an animal without a soul, then salvation has nothing to do with a better life beyond. Rather, it is liberation from the present Atyranny@ of capitalism.

Morals

In the meantime, the end justifies the means. And so, their philosophy of morals is that anything

goes. Stalin made the blunt declaration that

Asincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water or wooden
iron.@"

During his lifetime he certainly fulfilled his declaration. Yaroslavsky, one of their spokesmen, said, AAnything that helps the revolution and the Communist party is ethical. If it is advantageous to the party to lie, then lie. To steal, then steal. To murder, then murder.@" Thus you begin to see the viciousness of its basic beliefs.

Social Program

Its social program is mainly for propaganda purposes. To them it is pure folly to relieve misery for, as one writer shows:

ATo relieve misery is to reduce dissatisfaction and to reduce
dissatisfaction is to retard the revolution. The individual is totally
unimportant. It is the State that counts.@"

The State tells the citizen what he should read, where he shall work, what he shall believe. The teacher is told what he shall teach. The preacher is told what he shall preach. History is rewritten according to the Communist point of view. Art, music, and other forms of culture are controlled by the State and produced according to its specifications.

Everywhere individualism is stifled and everything is made to conform to the dictates of the State as living people, like so much raw material, are chiselled, hammered, twisted and remade until

Athe image of God in man has been erased and in its place is the
faceless image of the mass man.@"

Plan of Action

Undergirding it all, is the Communist's plan of action, which is both revolutionary and evolutionary. According to Marx, the ultimate victory of Communism is inevitable. He saw it gradually evolving out of capitalism as that system slowly decayed. To that end the Communist

is to use every means of propaganda:

the radio,

the press,

the theater and, yes,

even the church,

as a means of speeding up the revolution.

When these fail, Marx, Lenin, Stalin and the Cominform that rules Russia today, are in agreement that their final form of persuasion must be force. Out of evolution will come revolution! Until the victory is won it will be a constant vacillation between the two.

For a while they will push. When resistance becomes too great they will relax their pressure. At times their technique will employ sweet talk and everything will appear to be Asugar and spice and all things nice.@ But all the while they will be preparing to use violence when the occasion demands it.

On September 15, 1955, Khrushchev, Russia=s number one communist, said:

AAnyone who mistakes our smile for a withdrawal from the policies of Marxism-Leninism is making a mistake. Those who expect this will have to wait until Easter falls on a Tuesday.@"

The goal of Communism is world domination and nothing is too evil to be used if it serves their purpose.

That is one reason why I have chosen to preach these two sermons. Today we are in an era of relative good will. The winds of violence which blew so wildly under Stalin have died down to the well modulated coo of the dove of peace. The plan of attack has shifted gears. For a month, a year, or even a generation, we may be treated to periods of real tension. But never forget for one moment that the conflict of the ages continues. The Communists have not lost sight of the goal at which they aim--twist and turn, bob and weave as they may -- beneath their apparent

blunders and inconsistencies is a single purpose. It is supported by a passionate loyalty to their leader and his teachings which commands both admiration and fear.

The second reason for these sermons is, as I hope to show next week, that Communism is more than an economic system. It is a living religion. A vital faith. A challenging idea. Only a religion which is more alive, a faith which is more vital, an idea which is more challenging can overcome it. It is my firm conviction that in Christianity we have the answer if we are only wise enough to use it.