

## **COMMUNISM AND CHRISTIANITY - PART 2**

Dr. John Allan Lavender

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

One of the five great entrances to the Kremlin was originally known as the Spassky Gate. The Savior's Gate. It was set apart from the others by a magnificent picture of Christ which had been placed there in the year 1647. For over two and a half centuries any man who walked through that gate was obliged to remove his hat as a sign of his humility before God.

In 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, all of that was changed. The picture of our Redeemer was torn down. Along with it went the Christian concept of the worth of human personality and the universal need of God. In place of the admittedly casual religion that was typical of pre-revolutionary Christianity in Russia, the Red rulers have established a militant atheism. Their policy is aggressively hostile to religion and they seek to exterminate it all together.

Francis W. Coker, Professor of Government at Yale University, points out that they attempt to do this in two ways: First, by narrowly limiting the activities of religious groups. While they are allowed to hold a restricted number of services, they are prohibited from doing any kind of social, civic or philanthropic work. Any acts of kindness are to be done by the State alone. Thus, the church is set apart from the people. It is divorced from their human needs and the illusion is created that it does not really care about people and their problems.

Secondly, they are attempting to crush religion by carrying out a definite program of anti-religious propaganda and education aimed at luring the youth away from any vestige of faith they may have been given at home.

In his book, Conflict of the Ages, Arno C. Gaebelien gives an illustration of how they sometimes combine the two techniques thus making a devastating impression upon the plastic minds of small children. He says:

AOne of the tricks played on the children is to let them get very hungry. They are then told to pray to God to see if He will send them bread. So the innocent youngsters begin to pray little prayers to God for bread. Nothing happens. In the room is a picture of the Soviet idol, Lenin. The children are told that he will give them something to eat. They begin to plead with Lenin for something that will satisfy their hunger and presto, they are given bread.@

To the innocent and believing mind of little children, such things make a lasting impression.

It is right here that Communism and Christianity come to grips with each other. Our main quarrel with them is not political and the church's task is not to defend or attack any political party. The Christian faith can never be identified with one particular economic system. It came into being under the cruelest kind of dictatorship. It has lived and thrived under a variety of economic systems. It survives today, not because of the American way of life, but in spite of it.

Our main quarrel with Communism is not political, or economic, it is religious. We stand with every fiber of our beings against its vicious philosophy that leaves God out and denies the high worth of human personality. That is fundamental and it is imperative that we recognize the true nature of our adversary.

To be withstood, Communism must be understood. So I wish to say first of all that

### **Our Enemy is Not Economic but Religious**

One of the great paradoxes of Communism is that while it officially denounces religion in any form, it actually offers itself as a substitute religion.

Look at the way they have deified their leaders. Regarding Lenin, one author writes:

AHundreds visit his shrine every day; his statues are set up in public places; pictures of him are put in positions of special honor in

factories, schools and private homes; streets, railroad stations, and societies of all sorts are named for him. He is cited as an authority on every sort of subject and school children are taught to glorify him.@

The religious mood of Communism is not only seen in the deification of its leaders, but also in the fact that it has a substitute for every attribute and experience of religion.

Its doctrine of God is that He does not exist. But when the Communist is pushed for an explanation for the development of man he will refer in hallowed zones to dialectic materialism, the law of change in history which means that eventually social justice will win. The result is, that while the follower of Marx denies the existence of God, in the very next breath he says there is something which is working for his good that eventually will win. Now what is that but a pallid, impersonal, inadequate substitute for the God of Christianity, whom we say is working for the victory of righteousness and justice and who will ultimately triumph over all the earth.

The Christian doctrine of conversion, in which a man does an about face and is converted or turned about so that his life instead of leading away from God is directed toward him, is also duplicated in the Communistic idea of brainwashing. Through this diabolical process a man's way of thinking is completely changed and he becomes a new man@ in his attitudes and emphases.

Following conversion the new Christian is encouraged to study the Bible and to develop the ability to pray in order that he might grow in the Christian life. The young Communist is called upon to do the same. But instead of the Bible, he studies the words of Lenin and Marx. Sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph. Early in the morning and late at night he is required to attend cell meetings in which he must engage in thorough self-criticism in an effort to purge himself of such sins as laziness, insincerity, temper, pride, carelessness and a lackadaisical attitude toward the Party.

As the mature Christian grows in the Christian life he is asked to be a witness to others about Christ. He is faced with the fact that his only purpose in being a Christian is to lead others to His Savior.

This evangelistic spirit has been borrowed by Communism, too. As the young convert develops in the Communist way of life, he is sent out to spread his gospel. And few Christians equal him in discipline and self-sacrifice as he willingly marches under the banner of the hammer and sickle singing,

AI will go where the revolution needs me most.@"

Take any other attribute of religion and you will see that Communism has its substitute:

Their Messiah is Karl Marx.

Their Holy Book is Das Kapital.

Their shrine is the tomb of Lenin.

For the Kingdom of God on earth they have substituted the dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Thus you can see that Communism is not really an economic system, but a holy, religious order with a set of rigorous and unyielding dogmas and a hierarchy that demands unconditional surrender and absolute loyalty.

### **The Alternative Is Vital Christianity**

There is only one way to meet the passion and fire of this new religion: that is with a passion and fire which excel it. You cannot bomb an idea out of existence. You cannot machine gun a faith into subjection. Thus the utter folly of placing our prime hope for survival, let alone victory, in vast stock piles of military devices. We are told by our leaders that we can only win if we are in a position to deal from strength. I agree. But it must not only be the strength of the military. It must also be the strength of a vital Faith and a commitment to that Faith which transcends anything the Communists can put forward.

Well, we have the Faith. The question is: Do we have a real commitment to it? The one thing Communists and Christians have in common is that in a world of doubt and skepticism they are both believers. They are both devoted to a great idea. Until now we have been out-played, out-fought and out-lived.

We have not fed the roots of our Faith so they could grow deep into our souls. Even though we have spilled the phraseology of Christianity from our lips, we have not been careful to apply the real meaning of those phrases in daily living. The tragedy is that with the eternal truth of God in our hands we have flippantly skipped through life, gaily juggling the gracious gifts of God as if they were only trinkets.

If for a moment it suited our convenience to pay homage to our Faith, we did so. But whenever the demands became too great, we quickly poured the cold water of indifference upon the faint sparks of passion that had begun to glow. With a casual *I don't want to get that involved*@ we nonchalantly retreated into the shell of mediocrity. May God forgive us.

You see, the situation resolves itself down to this:

AThe Communists have the zeal, but no truth: We have the truth, but no zeal. They have the heat, but no light; We have the light, but no heat. They have the passion, but no ideals. We have the ideals, but no passions. And neither of us is right@

For while they sin against light, we sin against love, and I cannot help but wonder which of the two displeases God the most. In Revelation we are given a clue. We are told that when God saw that the church in Laodicea was neither hot or cold, He said,

ABecause you are lukewarm I will spew thee out of my mouth@  
(Rev.3:16).

I will let you make your own implications and draw your own conclusions.

The final judgment, however, must be this: we can never drive Communism out of the world. We can only crowd it out with something that is more wonderful: the Love of God expressed in redeemed lives and vital Christian living. And thus we come to an awareness that

**The Deciding Move Is up to Christianity.**

How are we going to make an adequate reply to Communism? First we must recognize that the threat is real and that it could happen here.

Dr. James Clarke, the famous Scotch Presbyterian preacher, tells how after giving an address on Communism at a service club, a seemingly intelligent business man came up to him and said: "I simply won't let myself believe it." Well, as Dr. Clarke points out, "That does not change the fact that the threat is real. We may choose to live in a world of illusion. We may decide to be undecided and we may resolve to be unresolved." But such an incredibly reckless attitude will only speed us to our doom.

I don't mean to suggest that we grow hysterical about it and dream up a Communist behind every bush or see "Red" whenever anybody protests against things as they are. But, it is essential that we recognize that Communism may very well be to the Twentieth Century Church what the Egyptians and Babylonians were to Israel: a purge to prepare them for the Messiah's coming.

We are assured of the fact that the ultimate victory will be the Lord's. In the meantime, we may, like the Israelites of old, be subjected to captivity and occupation in preparation for our Lord's return. The Kingdom of God is not synonymous with the American way of life, however noble that way of life may be. And it may yet be necessary for us to be purged of our spiritual shallowness, our moral flabbiness and our amazing confidence in the power of the almighty dollar to solve all things.

May God grant that it shall never be, but do not discount the fact that we may still have to stand amid the ashes of modern society before the world will be willing to build an altar to God at which every knee shall bow and every voice shall raise its hymn of praise.

We must realize that these two philosophies are irrevocably and eternally incompatible.

This poses a new problem in history. Up until now the statesmen could meet together around the bargaining table and arrive at some compromise that was acceptable to both. Unfortunately, as much

as we might wish it to be so, with Christianity and Communism there is no middle ground. The world is not big enough for both. One or the other must go down. There are differences that are irreconcilable and tensions that can never be surmounted. James Clarke illustrates what I mean.

Christianity believes one thing about the nature of the universe,  
Communism another.

Christianity believes one thing about the nature of man, Communism  
another.

Christianity teaches that the state is the servant of man, Communism  
teaches that man is the servant of the State.

Christianity affirms that God is almighty,  
Communism affirms that the state is almighty.

Christianity serves and glorifies God,  
Communism denies that He even exists.

Christianity declares that the family is the central core of society,  
Communism denies its validity.

Christianity believes in the law of love and seeks to unite men,  
Communism demands class warfare and aims at dividing men.@"

Make no mistake about it, this rival faith is the antithesis of everything we hold dear. If we are to make an adequate answer to it, we must realize that the two are irrevocably and eternally incompatible.

We must respond to Communism's missionary zeal with an evangelistic passion of our own.

We must free ourselves from the four walls of our sanctuaries and meet the challenge where it exists.

Our evangelism must carry over into the shop, the office and the school. Christian young people must dedicate themselves to a Christian career in one of the four crucial fields of influence: communications, transportation, education and finance. They must put the making of a life ahead of the making of a living as they apply Christian principles in every relationship regardless of the cost. Furthermore, this evangelism must be alive to the great social issues of our day. It must not only

affirm that every human is a child of God -- an immortal soul for whom Christ died -- but it must put that affirmation into practice as it strives to crush out oppression, intolerance, bigotry and persecution of every kind.

The world will never be impressed with our glowing words about the high worth of human personality as long as we condemn many of our own brothers to a foul and mean existence that thwarts their every move and consigns them to a second class citizenship. It is a heavy demand that the situation places upon us. Only an alert evangelism that is shot through with the spirit of prayer and humility will be equal to the hour.

Today our world is hungry for a moment of peace. A taste of security. A breath of happiness. But we shall never have them as long as we make them the primary concern of our hearts. They are only dividends on our investments in evangelism. Jesus said:

ASeek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things shall be added unto you@ (Matt 6:33).

Finally, we must renew our commitment to the things that matter most.

This brings the matter right down to us as individuals. You see, a crowd has no soul to be saved. No conscience to be stirred. It cannot be convicted of sin or moved to repentance. The Awhosoever@ of which the Bible speaks is a single person.

And thus, when I say that Awe@ must renew our commitment, I mean you and me. For the Church is us. Christianity is us. And so, the Christian answer to Communism must begin right here in this church this morning. It must begin with me. Not with the fellow who lives across the street or down the alley or on another block, but with me.

For as Clarke says so succinctly:

AChristianity will never be Heroic, if I am a coward. Gigantic, if I am a pygmy. Universal, if I am an isolationist. Sacrificial, if I am a self-



seeker. Redemptive, if I am uncreative. Magnificent, if I am miserly.  
It will never win the heart of the world, if it has not won mine. It will  
never baptize the earth if it does not baptize me.®

The challenge of the hour is a personal challenge. It does not place its demands upon the crowd but upon the individual. It is not addressed to somebody else, it is addressed to you.

There you have the answer to Communism.

Recognize the threat is real and that it could happen here. Realize  
these two philosophies are irrevocably and eternally incompatible.  
Renew your own commitment to those things that matter most.  
Respond to Communism's missionary zeal with an evangelistic  
passion of our own.

One night the disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee in a little fishing boat. It was one of those fierce nights that every sailor fears. The winds were contrary and the sea was rough. Along about the fourth watch the disciples saw Jesus walking toward them on the water. And Peter cried out, ALord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.® And Jesus answered, ACome.® Peter climbed over the railing of the ship and began to walk toward Jesus on the water. Suddenly he began to sink. And the scriptures tell us why. It says: AWhen he saw the wind was boisterous he was afraid® (Matt 14:30). In other words, he began to take into account the opposition. The strength of the wind. The heaviness of the sea.

Is that not why we are sinking today? Like Peter, we have begun to take into account the powerful forces that are against us. We have tuned our ears to the winds of public opinion. We have turned our attention to the raging sea of social, economic and political opposition that surrounds us. We are sinking for the very same reason that Peter sank. We have taken our eyes off the Master.

As the black waters of Galilee began to engulf him, Peter cried out, ALord, save me.® Through the

darkness of the night he felt the hand of Jesus lifting him up and he heard a soft voice saying,  
AOh ye of little faith, why didst thou doubt?@

The answer to our dilemma lies in the repetition of Peter's cry. For we drown in a stormier sea than Galilee. Rising in treacherous waves that threaten to capsize our earth is the black threat of Communism. If we would be saved from our impending ruin we must cry out with all of the urgency of a drowning man: ALord, save me.@

Then it will be that, once again, through the storm and darkness will come the sure hand of our Redeemer giving strength and courage and direction. The storm may not be stilled so quickly as was the storm on Galilee. It may rage on for a seeming eternity. But in the end we shall say with Peter and the disciples: AIndeed thou art the Son of God.@ For within the framework of our own private storm we will have proved the validity of His promise: AIf you abide in my Word...you shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free@ (John 8:32).