

THE REAL COMMUNIST CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANITY

**Mr. Eric D. Butler's Address At
The 1959 Melbourne Anglican Synod.**



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After a long debate which clearly demonstrated that many Christians, including members of the clergy, do not understand the fundamental nature of Communism, the 1959 Melbourne Anglican Synod carried a resolution stating—

“That Communism is absolutely incompatible with Christianity and constitutes a deadly and growing challenge to it.” The motion also requested His Grace, Archbishop Woods, to take such steps as he thought proper to promulgate an authoritative statement on the position of the Church of England in the diocese in relation to Communism, its philosophy, objectives, strategy and tactics.

The question of Communism was raised by Mr. Eric D. Butler, who in speaking to his original motion, subsequently amended, said:

This motion concerns not only the fundamental issue of our times, but the central question which has dominated the entire history of the human race. That question is one of power; whether the individual is to be merely the passive instrument of centralized power wielded by other individuals, or whether power is to be decentralized in order that individuals may, through the exercise of freedom of choice, progressively develop their own personalities.

Communism is not merely a question of economics and sociology. Its main challenge is to the Christian conception concerning the nature of man and his relationship to God. The dedicated Communist proposes to create a completely new world in which the worship of God will be replaced by the worship of man. And in

order to do this the Communist wants power. It is essential that Christians do not allow themselves to be diverted from considering this central issue of power.

The motives behind Communism are as old as man, and the real problem confronting the Christian Church is the same problem it has faced ever since the famous statement concerning Caesar and God was given social significance by outstanding Church leaders as they attempted to exercise Authority to curb Power. It is impossible to develop this matter here, but I draw attention to it because I believe that the Christian Church *alone* can provide the type of leadership so desperately needed today, as we stand face to face with a challenge from Caesar which surpasses anything previously witnessed in human history. The only thing new about Communism is the techniques it possesses for enslaving both bodies and minds. I refer not only to mechanical technological developments, but to the numerous forms of what has come to be known as brain-washing.

While subversion and the various forms of sabotage are a major part of the disruptive programme of the Communists, the main, decisive work is done openly in the attack on the mind. This work is going on every day without our clergy and Christian bodies realizing just what is happening.

REALITY OF CHALLENGE

At present we are not equipped to meet the real challenge of Communism. Burdened down by their day-to-day activities, our clergy have little time in which to equip themselves. A Report such as this motion suggests would at least supply them with a ready, comprehensive and authoritative source of knowledge.

It will, of course, be said by some that I am exaggera-

ting the Communist menace. It is a frightening fact that there are some people who apparently do not grasp the seriousness of the situation. Let me turn aside for a few minutes to make clear that I am dealing with a reality we ignore at our peril.

The astonishing increase in the growth of Communist power and influence since 1917 is without parallel in human history. Just after the dawn of the century, in 1903, Lenin established his Bolshevik Party with seventeen supporters. Fourteen years later, in 1917, Lenin and his associates conquered Russia with a mere 40,000 supporters. Today the Marxist-Leninists not only directly control nearly one thousand million human beings, but they have highly disciplined supporters in every non-Communist country in the world and wield enormous influence through numerous media. We might profitably contrast the growth of Communism with the growth of Christianity. It is now nearly 2,000 years since Christ gave His famous instruction: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel," but today, after the testimony of those 2,000 years, no more than a third of the world's peoples have heard the name and the teachings of Christ.

When we bear in mind the rate of development of Communist power, it is not surprising that the Communist teaching that Communism is historically inevitable is a powerful psychological weapon, which not only helps to break the will to resist in the non-Communist ranks but also helps the Communists to maintain the will to win in their own ranks.

NOT INEVITABLE

Most of the major victories of the Communists have, of course, had nothing whatever to do with historical inevitability. Many of them have been the result of short-sightedness, lack of principles, and, in many cases,

outright treachery, by those supposed to be resisting Communism. For example, there was nothing inevitable about the decisions made at the Yalta Conference in 1945, decisions which paved the way for the vast Communist expansion in the post-war years. But, whatever the real reasons for their advances, the Communists have persistently stressed the theme that these advances proved that the non-Communist world is doomed and that the advent of Communism is imminent. If people can be convinced that any development in human affairs is inevitable, that it is a manifestation of some natural law, particularly if this law has been proved "scientifically," then they see no good purpose in resisting such development, even though they may not like it.

CYCLIC THEORY

It is appropriate to observe here that the Communists are aided immeasurably on the question of historical inevitability because of the dominant teaching of the historians of the West, the majority of whom accept the cyclic theory of history: that civilizations rise and fall because of their nature, and that today we are living during the decline of our present civilization. Although many of the historians preaching the cyclic theory stress the importance of religion in the growth of any civilization, the important point to understand is that their views lead to the conclusion that the continuing disintegration of our present civilization is inevitable. All theories of inevitability strike right at the heart of the philosophical view of the individual's being able to use creative initiative to change the course of events from what they otherwise would have been.

And this brings me to the central thesis of this address, which is that the true nature of the Communist challenge cannot be understood until it is first understood that every policy in this world stems from a philosophy,

is the result of a conception in reality. Policies are *evidence* of things unseen, of ideas concerning the nature of man and the universe. Behind every policy there must be a philosophy, just as a bridge is the material expression of a conception which is first committed to paper in the form of a plan. The basic cleavage in the world is not geographical, but philosophical. Paradoxical though it may appear, the general failure to understand Communism in the non-Communist world is the result of the spread of the same materialistic philosophy underlying Communism.

One of the greatest errors concerning Communism is to regard it merely as a revolutionary movement born of a hatred of capitalism. This attitude directs attention away from the truth that Communism presents a complete philosophical system, with a powerful appeal to far more than the materially poor of this world.

It was Marx's successor, Lenin, who stressed the importance of capturing the student minds of the world in order that the Communist movement could be continually recruiting the necessary intellectual leaders. Students the world over have had no difficulty in accepting Communism because they are products of the revolt against the Natural Law philosophy, which first made its appearance in the area of Western culture among the ancient Greeks, and which was further developed in relationship to the idea of personality by the early Christian philosophers. The Natural Law philosophy is based upon a conception of the rules of the universe transcending human thinking. It postulates that man's destiny is but a part of an order greater than himself; that man is not self-sufficient.

As against this conception, there is the idea that the Intellect, or Reason, is not only the supreme power in the universe, but that it is supreme as manifest in man. The student intellectual has no difficulty in believing that the idea of the worship of God is a gross super-

stition which restricts the freedom of the individual, but sees nothing illogical in the idea that man should worship Reason, Logic and Science. We hear much about the Age of Reason, but the Reason, like a slide-rule, is incapable of providing anything more than the logical sum of all the data provided. The Reason is a pure instrument and of itself can prove nothing.

It is obvious that the scientific method has led to an enormous knowledge about reality, but it is essential that we do not lose sight of the basic truth that the knowledge comes from reality itself and not from science as such. Because the Communists persistently claim that Marxian Socialism is scientific, and those young minds are conditioned to accept science as something which, in the hands of a superior class like themselves, provides them with power to sweep away all the superstitions of the past, it is not surprising that Marx's sociology and economics are accepted as necessary for the creation of a Brave New World.

The overwhelming majority of Christians, including the clergy, know little or nothing of the philosophical works of Marx and Engels on behalf of militant atheism. I would be pleasantly surprised if there were six members of this Synod who have read even one of the basic Communist philosophical works. Do not let us be diverted from this philosophical issue by the superficial observation so often made by many politicians who, generally in an exasperated tone, say: "Of course I am opposed to Communism. I don't need to be told that it is bad, and it is therefore a waste of my time to be making myself familiar with its philosophical aspects."

Now, we are all opposed to cancer; we know it is malignant and destructive of the human body. But neither cancer nor any other disease can be destroyed merely by people saying they are opposed to it. The basic causes and nature of the disease must be examined and appropriate action taken, based upon knowledge.

Communism is a disease which we must understand if we are to deal with it realistically.

We Christians in particular must understand the philosophical roots from which all Communist activities grow. I wonder how many here have taken the trouble to read Engels' most able work, *Ludwig Feurbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in which he makes a most comprehensive review of Marxist teachings on dialectical materialism.

Before someone becomes impatient and asks what the views put forward by Engels last century have to do with Christianity in 1959, I hasten to draw attention to a new and dangerous Communist ideological offensive which is already causing havoc among a large number of religious people throughout the world, and which, I hope, will provide an example of the nature of the problem which I am attempting to bring before this Synod. This new ideological offensive is designed to prove that dialectical materialism is more "spiritual" than the traditional religious conceptions, and is based upon a view first put forward by Engels in the work I have just mentioned. It is true that Engels referred to "things of the spirit," but by those words he meant those things which he claimed were solely the by-products of materialistic development, since the only reality was matter.

One of the greatest services rendered the cause of the Antichrist by the notorious Dean of Canterbury is that chapter in his last book, *Christians and Communism*, in which he attempts to demonstrate that dialectical materialism is compatible with the Christian view concerning the spiritual nature of man. Whether or not this development of Engels' teaching concerning "things of the spirit" first suggested to the Communists a new

technique for undermining Christianity I do not know, but Christians everywhere should grasp the significance of a high Communist directive given on this matter in the March issue of *World Marxist Review*, one of the leading Communist theoretical journals. This directive clearly demonstrates that the Communists are intensifying their new tactics of attempting to subvert Christianity instead of attacking it directly, and of enlisting Christians to aid them in their programme.

“SPIRITUAL”

The article in the *World Marxist Review* tells its Communist readers how to use those who believe in God without becoming victims of their own deceit. The Communists are given to understand that their dialectical materialism is the true originator of “spiritual” ideas. After claiming that the “cultural developments” and scientific achievements in Soviet Russia are “spiritual,” and are leading to the development of “perfect man,” the *World Marxist Review* states: “And this is only part of the spiritual development of society as a whole in the period of gradual transition from socialism to Communism.”

Let us face the fact that this type of new Communist tactic has every chance of advancing the whole Communist offensive when we see in our own society the uncritical acceptance of speed, size and material development as evidence of progress, when we see even clergymen talking about the economics and material achievements of Communism while paying little or no attention to the *purposes* which these achievements serve. Until we come to grips with this issue, we cannot possibly hope to launch an effective counter-offensive against the Communist drive towards complete world-power.

Today we stand face to face with one of the greatest crises in the recorded history of man. While I firmly believe that there are still great spiritual and cultural reserves in our society, that there are many outside the Church who still accept the values upon which European civilization was built, I also believe that the Christian Church alone can, by fearless leadership, mobilize these reserves into common action against the forces of the Antichrist. We Christians have a special responsibility. This is the greatest challenge the Christian Church has faced in its long history, and I ask this Synod to accept the challenge by passing this motion unanimously.

