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## EDITORIAL

### THE CHURCH AND COMMUNISM

WILL Karl Marx prove in the long run to be an ally and not an enemy of the Christian faith? Judged by the recent pronouncement of the Roman Church on the subject an affirmative answer to the question from that quarter is unthinkable. According to the Roman view Communism is of the Devil, an enemy to be fought tooth and nail in a life and death struggle.

The Anglican Church has also declared its mind on the matter, and, to our view, in a more Christian and positive way, for while the Lambeth Declaration speaks in a forthright fashion about the evils of Communism it also recognises that Communism, in its passion for social justice, offers a challenge to the Christian Church.

If there is any pronouncement from our own denomination on this issue we venture to hope that it will avoid the barrenness of a merely negative tirade. We have to reckon with the fact that in many lands Communism has attracted not only some of the natural thugs of the world, but also some of its finest young men and women because of their discontent with the evils of capitalism and their concern for a juster social order. Is there not something to be learned from a movement which can inspire men and women with a passion for disinterested service and a willingness to make any and every sacrifice in the cause? Can such a movement be *wholly* of the Devil? Is it not much more likely to be a mixture of good and evil, truth and error? When we recall the power of Communism in lands of poverty and exploitation is it not even conceivable that though it is based on a false philosophy of life it is God's judgment on an unchristian social order? Let us by all means recognise the evils of Communism, but also go on to ask what God is saying to us Christians in the rise of this movement. May He not be summoning us to a deeper understanding of the social content of our wide-ranging Christian faith?

The Student Christian Movement is doing a useful work in publishing books which expound the significance of Communism for Christian faith. Alexander Miller's "The Christian Significance of Karl Marx" (3s.) and J. M. Cameron's more recent "Scrutiny of Marxism" (2s. 6d.) may be mentioned. We are glad to know

## THE SACRAMENTS

IN the January *Fraternal* an article entitled "The Ordinances" sought to discard the term "sacrament" and to view Baptism and the Lord's Supper primarily as opportunities for expressing our dedication and gratitude to God. To look on them chiefly as occasions for the bestowal of grace was regarded as selfish, untrue to experience and unbiblical.

The present writer is not greatly concerned to defend the use of the term "sacrament," though its loose employment by certain writers is scarcely adequate ground for rejecting it. He does, however, deplore that a fellow-Baptist, in a discussion on the nature of the sacraments, should write with scarcely a reference to the Scriptures. Experience has abundantly shown that we cannot take the Bible for granted in this or any like enquiry. Constantly we have to recall Paedo-baptist colleagues from building on the sands of tradition and individual fancy and make them examine the New Testament foundations. If we, of all people, find ourselves in opposing camps over this subject, we need to take our own medicine and turn again to the documents of our Faith.

What is the chief end of Baptism? There can be little doubt that the general emphasis amongst us falls on its value as a means of confession and that other significations are subordinated to this main idea. It is normally held to make no difference to the condition of the baptised person; its virtue lies in the expression of spiritual realities already appropriated. Such a view accords with that of the article quoted: Baptism is our act for God, our response to His appeal for obedience.

Without denying the confessional value of Baptism, we suggest that it is a secondary, not primary, meaning of the rite, and that the additional conclusion mentioned above is a pure rationalisation, impossible to be squared with the New Testament expositions of the matter. In every explicit mention of Baptism it is regarded as the supreme moment of our union with Christ in His redemptive acts for us and our consequent reception of the life of the Spirit. In Rom. vi, 4-8, the statements, "We were buried with Him . . . united with Him by the likeness of His death . . . our old man was crucified with Him . . . we died with Christ," and their counterparts of resurrection with Christ, all imply that outward expression and inward experience should coincide, rather than that the latter precede the former. Paul interprets his language for us in Gal. iii, 27, "As many of you as were baptised into Christ did put on Christ"; the act mediated the experience of receiving Christ. So also 1 Pet. iii, 21, views Baptism as the occasion of declaring a good conscience towards God and participating in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

Manifestly, union with Christ and sharing in His life cannot take place without receiving the Holy Spirit. If no explicit Scripture

linked Baptism with the gift of the Spirit we should have to postulate the relationship. Why, then, should we be at pains to deny that Titus iii, 5, refers to Baptism? "Not by works of righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing (or laver) of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Comparing this with Acts ii, 33, we infer that Baptism initiates the believer into participating not only in Christ's death and resurrection but also in the Church's experience of Pentecost; the three moments of redemption are regarded as fused into one experience in the act of Baptism. Paul's statement, therefore, "In one Spirit were we all baptised into one body," must be taken to relate water baptism and Spirit baptism as ideally concomitant events in individual experience.

If this be valid exegesis, how can one assert that the important thing in Baptism is what we give to God? Without minimising the necessity of faith and confession of Christ, such a view is tantamount to esteeming our act of surrender to God as of greater value than His gift of Himself to us.

The objections taken to this view are usually on other than exegetical grounds. Free Churchmen are disinclined to believe that a sacrament can have such significance. It seems aimed against the teaching that a man is renewed in spirit and made heir of salvation on the exercise of faith. It makes Baptism operative instead of symbolic of a crisis already accomplished in the believer. It postpones the operation and gift of the Spirit from the submission of faith to the reception of an outward ordinance.

Yet it is precisely in that word "postpone" that the key to the problem seems to us to lie. For the New Testament knows nothing of postponing a baptism after conversion. Every recorded baptism takes place immediately upon profession of faith, the instances are too well known to require statement. In the primitive Church conversion and baptism are so indissolubly linked together that they may be regarded as a unity. In such a context to speak of a Christian dying and rising with Christ and receiving the Spirit of Pentecost in baptism is no magical concept, for the submission to the rite was the occasion of surrender to Christ. This is no setting of a sacrament over against repentance and faith, as though Baptism made conversion unnecessary, but the intertwining of the two so that baptism is a part of conversion. It is only when that primitive relationship is separated that sacerdotalism creeps in and *opus operatum* becomes the watchword instead of the New Testament principle *nullum sacramentum sine fide*.

Baptists seem to have overlooked the fact that they have been almost as culpable as others in breaking asunder the unity of conversion and baptism. It has become an established custom

to introduce a probationary period between a man's profession of faith and his confession of it in baptism and joining the Church; sometimes it is three months, sometimes six, while if the person is younger as much as twelve months. Baptism thus tends to become a kind of promotion in discipleship, a first milestone in the Christian pilgrimage, instead of initiation into Christ and the Christian life. The main excuse offered is the necessity of giving a new convert instruction so as to establish him in his faith. We grant that this is necessary, but who said it should precede baptism? Contrary to popular opinion and practice, the whole New Testament set-up of doctrine and organisation is based on the assumption that instruction in doctrine is for the baptised Christian, not for the enquirer.\* If that seems like putting the cart before the horse it is only because we still are not used to the fact that *kerugma* precedes *didache*, the gospel before doctrine. Dodd and Brunner have surely taught in vain if we have not grasped that, yet our practice belies what they have striven to demonstrate.

If under modern conditions we fear to baptise converts straightway, then let us recognise that in so doing we have changed the nature of baptism. The New Testament declares that it is the transition of the believer from one world to another, from life estranged from God to life in Christ; whatever else baptism twelve months after conversion may bring, it cannot bring *that*; to teach that it will, is to head straight for Romanism. But let baptism once more be regarded as part of conversion, the moment of supreme surrender rather than the expression of a believer's obedience, and we shall be free once more to teach the New Testament doctrine of Baptism.

It is to this serious view of Baptism that former Paedo-baptist theologians like Barth and Brunner are now turning, not to the concept of an ordinance whose prime significance is the action of the candidate. It is this conception which certain leading Anglican theologians are now urging their denomination to face and with which they are endeavouring to bring their present practice into line (see especially the report of the Archbishops' commission entitled, "The Theology of Christian Initiation"). It would be the height of irony if our generation witnessed New Testament Baptism being championed by the theologians of Paedo-baptism communions while Baptists themselves lapsed into a sub-theological view of the rite by which they are named! If we are to take that opportunity, which Wheeler Robinson foresaw a generation ago would come, of leading the Body of Christ to the true view of Baptism, we shall do it only if we rise to a clearer apprehension of it than we appear to possess to-day.

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\*Note the significance of the fact that the Gospels, as well as Epistles, were primarily for believers. Luke i, 4.

There is much we would like to say about the Communion Service if space permitted. We constantly hear repeated Paul's record of the Institution in 1 Cor. xi, 23-26, as of course is right, but why is the significance of 1 Cor. x, 16, so frequently ignored? There the Lord's Supper is defined in terms of communion with Christ, and of His people's unity with Him in the breaking of bread and taking of the cup. Similarly, even though we deny entirely a sacramental interpretation to our Lord's discourse in John vi, and modern scholarship is on the whole not prepared to do that, we nevertheless ask whether there is any time when John vi, 57, is more truly realised than at the Lord's Table? If not, then are we being sacerdotal in coming to the Table for spiritual sustenance?

The writer has often reflected on the reason why Baptists hold the communion service once a month only (the second observance rarely affects the majority of a church's membership). Is part of the reason the tendency among us to restrict the significance of the communion service to the narrowest limits that Scripture can bear? However it may be, the fact remains that the primitive churches came together on the Lord's Day to *break bread*, and for such other exercises of worship as they were free to carry out; whatever else exigencies of the time denied observance, this was paramount. For the New Testament Acts ii, 42, xx, 7, suffice, while patristic evidence is too well known to require citation.

As his appreciation of the significance of the communion service deepened, the writer felt that there was no scriptural or theological justification for the usual practice of our churches. He called his church together to discuss making the communion service integral to morning worship, with the exception of the first Sunday of the month, when the normal evening observance was to be retained. Despite fears expressed as to the effect of the service on non-churchmembers and the possible deterioration of its significance through familiarity, it was decided that if the principle was right we must act accordingly; and so we did.

According to our previous contributor our morning attendances should have diminished; instead they perceptibly increased. When the position was talked over after a trial period, not one member wished to revert to the former custom.

The writer urges his brother ministers to consider this matter afresh, not from the point of view of expediency but of principle. That God is not bound to sacraments and that they are abused in some denominations may be freely admitted; the point is, if the New Testament can be taken seriously, He has ordained them for the normal use of the Church. The issue is not simply whether we hold a communion service once a month or more, but rather that if this is the ordained mode of the Church's gathering together for worship, ought we not to observe it? The answer of reason is ratified by experience: there is no occasion when the corporate

worship of a church is so intense as during the communion service; there is no occasion when the unity of Christ's people is so felt as during that service; the fact that other persons take part in the prayers of thanksgiving and worship enables us to express clearly and constantly the priesthood of all believers; the very elements of bread and wine perpetually set before us God's redemptive acts and help to keep Christ central to faith.

Where Scripture and experience corroborate one another so completely, why go another way?

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### OUR THREE-FOLD TASK

IT is now just over four years since my college career ended and I bade a fond and grateful farewell to those walls in which

I had studied and played and made friends with some of the best men I ever hope to meet. My student days were over; my days as a minister had begun. The task that lay before me seemed august indeed, and clearly defined; it was to be the spiritual leader of a community of some two hundred souls and to guide them forward towards the increase of Christ's kingdom. The intervening years have brought a deepening sense of the augustness of this task and a clearer view of its ultimate purpose, and for that I give thanks. But a difficulty, unforeseen in those idealistic college days, has arisen. And in raising it here, I like to think my name is Legion, and that I speak in the name of many.

Here it is. How can a minister best lead a community of people, almost every one of whom agrees as to the ultimate objective in view, and almost every one of whom has a different idea of the best means of getting there? "One the object of our journey"—so says the hymn, and it is true. But how can we get that unity of spirit which shall integrate our energies and set us marching in step along the same road like a great army? Having asked my question I must try to answer it, and let me hasten to add that my answer lays no claim either to originality or to scholarship. It is the word of a learner, and nothing more.

Our task would seem to lie in three main fields, all of which overlap in practice but which may be treated separately for the purpose of clarity.

First of all, the field of Worship. So many of our people live in little worlds of petty interests and narrow horizons, and if they are to be united in a living and advancing fellowship, they must start by becoming citizens of a larger world. And if our worship is the majestic thing it should be, it will lead our people into that larger world in which trivialities are seen in their right perspective and wider horizons open even for the most