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The Church and Communism

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The Fraternal

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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

that a book on the subject is shortly to be published by the Carey Kingsgate Press from the pen of H. Ingli James. It will be read eagerly by those who know him as a man who, while rejecting the lop-sided materialism of the Communist, is no whit behind him in his concern for social justice. Ministers are not called to become experts on the merits of dialectical materialism, but they ought to know what issues are involved in the impact of Marxism on Christian faith and ethics. It is only on the basis of knowledge in these matters that they can be helpful guides to others.

Canon Alan Richardson, in his fine book, "Christian Apologetics," suggests that Karl Marx is one of the (unrecognised) allies of the Christian faith in the fight against rationalism. It is a stimulating suggestion. There is certainly something stimulating, and for us ministers immensely encouraging, in the fact that the Communist movement has as its goal the ideal of social justice. The means it employs to achieve its ends are often evil, but the goal itself is one with which the prophets of the Old Testament were certainly in sympathy. May not the present weakness of the Church be in part due to the fact that we Christians have been content with conceptions of the Kingdom which are too narrowly individualistic, less than Biblical in their depth and range ?

WIDER STILL AND WIDER

Dr. Arnold T. Ohrn, the newly appointed Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, writing from the Queen Elizabeth on his return from the meetings of the Alliance Executive, sends us the following message. The suggestions contained are excellent but their carrying out would mean more organisation and a special fund. Our brethren on the Continent would have to be enrolled as Associate members and their subscriptions provided. Can this be done ?

The message begins : "I have to-day for the first time had the chance of reading a copy of your magazine and of making the acquaintance of your organisation. The thought struck me, what a good thing it would be if Baptist pastors on the Continent could be drawn into that circle of friends which you British have organised ! During this summer's travel in various countries I have met many of these men, some of them isolated from colleagues who can share their thoughts, some of them bereft even of the books which once were their solace and source of inspiration. Would it be possible to arrange for correspondence in English between British pastors and pastors in the countries from Norway to Italy ? Do not we Baptists need to strengthen our consciousness of belonging to a great World Fellowship ? "