HOW THE PROTESTANTS FIGHT COMMUNISM

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"The Entrance of Thy Words Giveth Light."

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HOW THE PROTESTANTS FIGHT COMMUNISM

By G. Bromley Oxnam

It is a striking and significant fact that communism has been unable to take root in Protestant countries. No Protestant land is seriously infiltrated by communism. Why?

The answer is found in soil and atmosphere. The soil is enriched by liberty and the atmosphere cleansed by truth wherever Protestantism prevails.

Protestant teaching fertilizes the good earth with freedom and democracy. Protestant insistence upon "the right of private judgment" develops the scientific attitude of mind, and penetrates the fog of ignorance and superstition.

Protestant countries are characterized by the free man in the free society, who discovers and declares the truth that frees, and who in co-operation with free fellow men seeks to apply that truth for the common good. In such freedom-loving Protestant lands lies the real barrier to Communist expansion.

Recently, the State Department issued a map indicating the religious affiliation of the people of Europe. The countries predominantly Roman Catholic are shown in purple. The countries predominantly Protestant are shown in orange. A distinguished diplomat looked at this map and said, "This purple section from Poland right across Europe, including southern Germany and on to Spain, is Roman Catholic and constitutes a formidable barrier to Communist expansion."

He was challenged immediately by one better acquainted with social fact. The real barrier to Communist imperialism is the orange area, the Protestant lands. Communism has not made headway in Protestant Finland, Protestant Sweden, Protestant Norway, Protestant Denmark, Protestant Holland or Protestant Great Britain.
On the other hand, Italy, which is 99 per cent Roman Catholic, was but recently in danger of Communist revolution. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Austria are in the Moscow orbit, and France has been seriously infiltrated. Catholic Spain is free from communism, but only at the cost of a bloody civil war and a Fascist dictatorship.

Today, Protestant Australia and Protestant New Zealand are not threatened by communism. Protestant United States is in no serious danger of accepting communism — certainly not in the great rural areas which are overwhelmingly Protestant, nor in the Protestant West with its heritage of the individualistic pioneer and the itinerant preacher, nor in the Protestant South.

It is high time that Protestant strength and Protestant strategy be understood.

One of the most powerful anti-Communist forces in the world is one which was influenced in large measure by Protestant preachers. That force is British Labor.

The early leaders of the British Labor movement were Methodist local preachers. The Wesleyan Revival and the rise of trades unionism were contemporaneous. Workers came to Wesley's meetings from the mines, the mills and the factories. Thousands were converted and entered his classes. Here, they were taught the truths of a just God's word. They were taught to speak in public, and how to organize. They became the nucleus of the newly formed labor movement.

Many Were Persecuted

Many of them were persecuted. Six Dorchester laborers were convicted of conspiracy because they had organized an agricultural workers' union. Transported in a convict ship to Australia, they became known as the "Tolpuddle Martyrs." Three of these men were Methodist local preachers; two others were active in the Tolpuddle Methodist Church; the sixth was so influenced by religious precept that he became a Sunday school superintendent upon his release.

Subsequently, thousands joined the National Agricultural Labourer’s Union, which was founded by another local preacher. One of the first two representatives of labor in Parliament was a Methodist local preacher. So was the first workingman to hold a Cabinet position. All these men were Christian, not Marxist; brotherly, not class-conscious; spiritual-
minded men, not materialists. Thus Protestantism played a leading part in shaping the dynamic anti-Communist force that is British Labor.

Protestants See the Threat

Ever since the Reformation, Protestantism has been preparing the people to resist tyranny. It has fought all forms of totalitarianism—political, economic, ecclesiastical. It does not declare "holy wars." It creates the invulnerable society. Today, it is fully aware of the Communist threat to religion and democracy.

Fourteen years ago E. Stanley Jones, one of the greatest of contemporary Protestant missionaries, wrote: "This generation, or at most the next, will have to decide between materialistic, atheistic communism and the Kingdom of God on earth . . . The issue will not be settled by argument but by the actual production of a better order . . . The Kingdom of the Atheistic Mass Man and the Kingdom of God are at the door of the world."

Protestantism has, therefore, condemned communism in clear-cut, easily understood pronouncements, and it has also summoned the people to the task of translating the ethical ideals of religion into the realities of economic justice, racial brotherhood and world order.

The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, composed of 27 Protestant and Orthodox churches and representing 28,907,341 members, issued a statement on Soviet-American relations on October 11, 1948. It said: "Marxist communism in its orthodox philosophy stands clearly opposed to Christianity. It is atheistic in its conception of ultimate reality and materialistic in its view of man and his destiny. Its utopian philosophy of history lacks the essential Christian notes of divine judgment, divine governance and eternal victory. Its revolutionary strategy involves the disregard of the sacredness of personality which is fundamental in Christianity."

The New Menace

The Lambeth Conference, which meets in London every ten years, brings together the leaders of the Anglican communions of the world. Three hundred and twenty-nine archbishops and bishops were present at the 1948 session, at which the Archbishop of Canterbury presided. An Encyclical Letter was drafted to be read in all the churches on October 10, 1948. It declared: "Mankind has only recently escaped conquest by totalitarian states which deified their own power. It now finds itself threatened by the new
menace of Marxian communism which exalts atheism, puts supreme confidence in material progress and proclaims its gospel with a militant enthusiasm which expects to conquer the world. Christians must repudiate this form of communism and must condemn the cruelties, injustice and lying propaganda which are inherent in it. . . ."

Points of Conflict

In August, 1948, the World Council of Churches met in Amsterdam, with representatives from 147 denominations—Protestant, Orthodox and Old Catholic—in 44 nations. They considered "the points of conflict between Christianity and the atheistic Marxian communism of our day," and listed the following points, among others: "The materialistic and determined teachings, however they may be qualified, that are incompatible with belief in God and with the Christian view of man as a person, made in God's image and responsible to him"; "the ruthless methods of Communists in dealing with their opponents"; "the demand of the party on its members for an exclusive and unqualified loyalty which belongs only to God"; and "the coercive policies of Communist dictatorship in controlling every aspect of life."

The Methodist Church is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. At its quadrennial General Conference of 1948, with 700 delegates from 51 nations present, the Episcopal Address signed by all the bishops declared: "We reject communism, its materialism, its method of class war, its fallacious economics and its false theory of social development; but we know that the only way to defeat it permanently is to use the freedom of our own democracy to establish economic justice and racial brotherhood. It is the man who is not exploited who is deaf to the slogan, 'abolish the exploitation of man by man.' It is the man who knows he is treated justly who refuses the sinister suggestion of revolutionary activity to win justice. The most effective antitoxin to dictatorship abroad is life-giving democracy at home. It is a healthy democracy that is immune to Communist bacteria."

Building a Just Society

Similar statements could be produced from all of the great Protestant Churches, notably the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Disciples, the Congregationalists and the Lutherans. Through an educational system that reaches tens of millions, through pulpit and press, by church school and responsible commissions, Protestantism trains its followers. They are
coming to understand the menace of communism. But Protestantism centers upon building a just society as the basic defense against communism.

In building this society, Protestantism, fortunately, is not encumbered by vast possessions. It is not a great land-holder in European countries. Therefore, it is free to make decisions in terms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—not in terms of property, power and prestige. It knows that communism cannot be defeated by alliance with reaction. Stalin cannot be stopped by saluting Franco. On the contrary, the democratic principle must be extended to the economic life. Lambeth said that "Communism . . . has to be outlived, not merely outfought. . . ."

Tyranny Cannot Breathe

Communists know that Protestantism creates an atmosphere in which tyranny cannot breathe. Protestant proclamation of "the right of private judgment" and of "salvation by faith," says the great theologian Albert C. Knudson, "puts spiritual initiative and the sanctity of the individual conscience above submission to external authority . . . It puts [the individual's] welfare beyond the reach of all human tyranny and all enslaving weaknesses and makes him . . . a free man."

Protestants believe in democracy as the best form through which freedom may express itself. They, therefore, have organized their churches around democratic principles. The form of ecclesiastical government is determined by the people, whether episcopal, presbyterian or congregational. Protestant bishops are elected by the people. Protestant judicial bodies are constituted by the people, and their laws are adopted by the people. Protestant executives are responsible to the people. Protestant church finances are managed by the people, accounts are audited and reported to the people. Protestants know that power corrupts, that it will corrupt a church as well as a state, a bishop as well as a businessman. So they keep power in the hands of the people, and thereby create communities that communism cannot infiltrate.

Protestantism vs. Authoritarianism

Protestantism fears that a man who takes his religion from an "authoritarian church" may be so conditioned that he will take his politics from an "authoritarian party" or his economics from an "authoritarian class." That is why Protestants insist that a free man's church should be governed by democratic principles.
Protestantism stands for civil liberty, and attacks denials of such liberty in Communist countries. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ and the World Council of Churches were highly influential in securing the Universal Bill of Human Rights recently adopted by the United Nations.

Protestants and E.C.A.

The Protestant churches have supported the Marshall Plan. They have poured millions of dollars into relief and reconstruction. At the Cleveland Conference of Protestant leaders in 1949, they declared that "We must maintain sufficient strength to convince Soviet Russia that attempts to impose an ideology by force cannot succeed."

Protestantism has been realistic and constructive. It has steered clear of inflammatory utterances. There has been no appeal to passions, no summons to the battlefield. Protestantism calls upon free men to build a better society than dictatorship can ever build, a society in which the "sacredness of every personality is recognized and everyone finds opportunity for the fullest self-expression of which he is capable."

Literacy Is High

Wherever Protestantism has gone, the Scriptures have been widely distributed. And with the free mind, free education and the democratic way, the free community developed. Literacy is high in all the great Protestant nations. They are leaders in social advances such as old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, free medical care and so on. Study them from any angle and it becomes clear: Protestantism, by insuring the free mind, has made people ready to withstand the impact of systems of the unfree mind. Because it strikes the shackles from the minds of men, Protestantism strengthens the soul to resist communism.

Protestantism calls for a society at once free and moral, democratic and just. Protestant lands are convincing proof that Protestant strategy is sound and that victory is certain.