

COMMUNISM THREATENS CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILIZATION

AN ADDRESS BY

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The following is an address delivered by Dr. Charles Malik that was published in *The Canadian Unionist* in June of 1950.

There is a naive doctrine of war preached by Communism, namely that the cause of war is to be sought in the capitalist system itself, in the imperialistic rivalries between nation-states for the division of the world between them. But we must assert that Communism's own doctrines of revolution are no less, perhaps even more, disturbing than imperialist rivalries and wars. Those who perpetually point to, emphasize, and seek to acerbate the flames of civil strife, who elevate revolution into a creed, and seek to make it a science, cannot claim to be the exclusive lovers of peace. No one today preaches that nations ought to go to war with each other: the Communists do preach that revolution and civil war are inherent in all but Communist societies, and do seek to push the revolution to its bitter end.

The war of class against class is no less savage and fierce than the war of nation against nation: the strife of brother against brother, of neighbour against neighbour, is no less horrible than strife between states: peace and harmony once they are distributed within a community, are no easier, and are possibly more difficult to restore, than a disturbed peace and harmony between nations.

THE IDEA OF REVOLUTION

While our presence here in this organization (the United Nations) is the proof that we have abandoned the idea of settling disputes between ourselves by force and the resort to war, the Communists have not abandoned the idea of revolution, the idea of civil war and class struggle.

In view of this Communist doctrine of revolution, is it any wonder that the non-Communist world sincerely and clearly believes that Communism and the Communist State mean world-wide revolution, the wholesale overthrow of existing regimes in all countries? Is it any wonder that the non-Communist world must look after its own defenses? So long as the Communist ideology is the foundation and determinant of Soviet policy, is it not absolutely stupid and naive to suppose that the Soviet Union can really have a genuine desire for the security and stability of the rest of the world? Is it not obvious, except to the blind or frightened, that the only "peace" allowable by Communism is the peace of a forcibly communized and totalitarianly regimented world?

Faced with the olive branches which Soviet spokesmen offer, we can only conclude that they are cynical if temporary tactics, imposed by the present situation of international relations, and valid only so long as this situation continues to prevail. They carry no assurance whatsoever that Communism has given up its own form of aggression.

For, corresponding to the Communist outlook on historical development and international relations, there is a Communist form of threat to the peace *sui generis*; and international peace, as well as the security, stability, and sovereignty of non-Communist states, may be threatened not merely by the open attack of a Communist state against their borders, but also by its provocation and support of Communist revolutions within their borders. And therefore the non-Communist world will be perfectly stupid, and indeed about to dissolve, if it does not look feverishly to its own defenses against possible Communist aggression, whether external or internal, and if it does not seek to adequately meet the challenge of the Soviet Union.

It isn't as though we had a real state of peace dangerously shivering on the brink of war, concerning which therefore the supreme question would be how to prevent ourselves from going over the precipice. It is rather that we have a real state of fundamental conflict and unrest, and have had it on our hands for decades, and the supreme question is therefore how to resolve it, how to bring about a settlement, how to end the present time of troubles. It isn't as though there was already agreement and concord, and the supreme question therefore was how to prevent disagreement and discord. It is rather that there is already the most radical basic disagreement, and the supreme question therefore is how to achieve real, fundamental understanding. For there can be no greater disagreement than when one wants to eliminate your existence altogether.

THE COMMUNIST DOCTRINE OF WAR

The Communist doctrine of war and revolution postulates the inevitability of war and conflict; it ascribes war to the very essence of history and existence; it cannot conceive truth without dialectical opposition: and therefore, according to it, everything must sooner or later issue into conflict. Dialectical materialism is the primordial doctrine of eternal conflict. War is always there potentially. The original state is not rest and peace; the original state is struggle and change. Hence when rest and peace and understanding supervene, dialectical materialism at once suspects them: they are not natural!

Dialectical materialism can rest its sight only on the vision of unrest and revolution. It cannot be happy except in the belief that we are already on our way to the abyss. This is what we are ultimately dealing with. *I submit it is not an ordinary form of government a common type of philosophy It is a radical challenge which cannot be left unanswered.* Therefore the question is not whether war can be prevented, for we are in a sense in the midst of it: the question is whether and how war can be ended. The question is not whether a Third World War is inevitable: the question is whether peace, with dialectical materialism's absolute negation of peace, is really possible.

THE BASIC RIGHTS OF MAN

The deepest traditions of the West conceive of man as the subject of basic and inalienable and universal rights, rights which are based upon his very nature and which are embodied in natural law. From Sophocles to the Stoics and Cicero, and from St. Paul and the Church Fathers to St. Thomas, to Suarez and to Grotius, and even to the philosophers of the eighteenth century and the thinkers of the American and French Revolutions, natural law has been looked upon as the immediate basis of human rights. Communism rejects the very idea of intrinsic and inalienable human rights. Rights are not acknowledged and recognized—literally, recognized—and discovered by the Collective in the very nature of man, but are rather conferred upon the person by the Collective granted to the individual by society. They are conditionally given, and may be withdrawn. Rights that are absolute and unconditional rights that are natural and inalienable, rights that inhere in the very nature and dignity of man as a person, are rejected by Communism in theory, and trampled by Communist states in practice.

Freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression freedom of artistic creativity, freedom of association—and all the fundamental freedoms of man which pertain to the very dignity of personality—are tolerated to the extent, and only to the extent, to which they conform to the strict requirements of the interests of Communism as interpreted by Communist leadership.

HUMAN SPIRIT IS SUFFOCATED

The tragic fate of intellectuals, scientists poets and musicians under Communist rule—whether those who heroically remain loyal to their best lights at the risk of liquidation or those who disgracefully retrace their steps and make public retractions—is not surprising. The Communist state—at least, the dictatorship of the proletariat—like any other form of totalitarianism necessarily suffocates spontaneity, inner dynamism, freedom and diversity. The spirit of man, which can be itself and its best self only in freedom and love and genuine communion is choked and annihilated by totalitarianism. The loftiest heroism summoned in the human heart by an ideology of materialism is at best formal and one-sided pathetically narrow in scope and tragically impoverished in content. The noblest achievements of the human spirit are initially unauthenticated by indoctrination censorship and spiritual enslavement. Man is not respected by being declared “the most precious capital”; for man is only when he is viewed as a destiny-bearing and a destiny-burdened being and when his relation to himself and to others and to God springs freely and responsibly from the inner depths of his soul.

CONTRARY TO NATURE AND MEN

The totalitarian control by the state of every source of independence and freedom is absolutely contrary to nature and man. That the state, the mere organ of government and order, is the source of every law, every truth, every form of conduct, every social and economic relationship: that no science, no music, no economic activity, no philosophy, no art, no theology, is to be permitted except if it is state-licensed and state-controlled; all this is so false, so arrogant, so autocratic and tyrannical that no man who has drunk deep from the living waters of the Western Platonic-Christian tradition can possibly accept it. The state does not come in the first place; it comes in the tenth or fifteenth place: The University is higher than the State: the tradition of free inquiry is higher than the State: the Church is higher than the State: the family is higher than the State: natural law is higher than the State: the intimate circle of love and friendship is higher than the State: God is higher than the State: within limits, free economic activity is higher than the State.

THE STATE BECOMES A TYRANT

Far from the State determining the proper nature and limits of autonomy of these other things, they set proper limits to the activity of the State, so that if the State trespasses these limits, it ceases to be the State: it becomes a tyrant. By the word “higher” I mean that the University, the Church, the family, etc., contain sources of truth and being that are not only utterly independent of the State and belong to a separate realm altogether, but that this truth and being is qualitatively superior to any truth and being, belonging to the state as such, so that a ruler, or king, or dictator, passing a scientist, or mother, or priest, or saint, or lover, or philosopher, should take off his hat and bow to him or her in all respect; and should in addition sit at his or her feet and learn truths which his State could never teach him. The destruction of all this intermediate plenum of freedom is the most grievous sin committed by totalitarianism, of whatever stripe.

EIGHT BASIC ERRORS OF COMMUNISM

Because man is a rational being, the evil of his own doing always has its origin in an error of his mind. I shall now list the eight basic errors committed by the metaphysics of Communism, and contrast them in each case with the truth of the Western positive tradition.

1. That ultimate reality is through matter. The truth is that besides matter and utterly irreducible to it there is an independent and superior reality, namely mind and spirit.

2. The proper attribute of reality is change and strife. The truth is that there is a changeless and stable order of existence on which the mind can really rest.
3. There is no objective and eternal truth. The truth is that such a truth exists, and that only by humbly seeking and finding it can we achieve genuine understanding and real peace.
4. Only the immanent and temporal exist. The truth is that there is a whole dimension of transcendent forms fully accessible to the mind and heart.
5. There is no God. The truth is that there is a God who is the loving Father of all of us and who is the Creator of heaven and earth.
6. That, so far as the nature of things is concerned, only the tradition of Democritus, Lucretius, Feuerbach, and Marx is right. The truth is that this materialist tradition is thoroughly absorbed by the more concrete positive tradition from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and Whitehead.
7. Man is perfectible by his own self-sufficient efforts. The truth is that man has a certain inherent perversity of which he can only be cured by transcendent aid.
8. The human person is for the sake of society and the state. The truth is that society and the state are for the sake of the human person.

This is the sort of metaphysics which inspires Communism, and this is the kind of world which it seeks to realize here on earth. For all its genuine passion for social and economic justice, and for all its enduring positive achievements, the Communist world and ideal is nevertheless a materialistic, atheistic, dialectical, relativistic, purely immanent and man-made totalitarian world and ideal. I must conclude from all this that it is not true that Communist existence justifies the Communist revolution even if the end justified the means.

CRITIQUE OF THE WEST

It is fairly easy to work out a critique of Communism. The doctrine is only a hundred years old, and its effective entrenchment in the great Eurasian heartland is barely thirty years old. Besides, its basic literature is fairly compact: you have the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, which are fully accessible to any student.

It is far more difficult to elaborate a fundamental critique of the West. You do not have here a handful of masters as in the Communist world; you do not have a well-marked-out body of official literature. Governmental policy and action is not informed by rigid theory as in

the Communist world. There is endless variety and difference, considerable looseness of connection, and a great deal of fumbling and muddling-through and empiricism.

Yet a general critique is necessary, because war and peace are not only a function of Communism: they depend also on the state of health and illness in Western culture.

INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP OF THE WEST

I must say in all humility that the leadership of the West in general does not seem to be adequate to the unprecedented challenges of the age. There is a tragic dearth of men, men who are so genuinely in touch with the truth and with the hearts of their fellow-men as to have only to open their mouths to be loved and believed and followed. The world desperately cries for masters: for it is only the voice of conviction and truth that is going to save us.

There is a corresponding bankruptcy of fundamental ideas. There is thus in this realm an unequal struggle for the hearts of men between Communism and the West. Communism displays a set of generic ideas—I believe for the most part false—in which it passionately believes, for which Communists are willing—I believe misguidedly—to die. There is no comparable ideological passion in the West. The talk about democracy, freedom, representative government, is woefully inadequate: it deals for the most part with pure form, sheer external machinery. It does not satisfy man's deepest cravings for friendship and understanding and truth and love.

Politically, the West will not serve the cause of peace by allying itself with dark régimes just because it is more expedient not to disturb them. Such régimes are running sores on the body politic of humanity. The West must be honest enough to rebuke and challenge them. It must firmly lead into the broad ways of responsible change. Their peoples are poised to see whether the West acts from principle or from expediency. And the subversive whispers of world-revolution become more and more potent the more these peoples despair of their rulers and the West.

Nor does it do merely to reject Communism. *A positive alternative must be suggested. The only effective answer to Communism is a genuine spiritualized materialism which seeks to remove every trace of social injustice without loss of the higher values which constitute the very soul of the West.* Communism cannot be met by a mere *nay*; it requires a mighty *yea* which will do full justice to man's material needs but will at the same time place them in their subordinate position in the scale of values.

WORSHIP OF FALSE GODS

The challenge of this epoch is not Communism, but is whether Western society, conceived in the joyous liberties of the Greek city-states and nurtured on Christian charity, can still recover from the worship of false and alien gods and return to its authentic sources.

The challenge of the moment is whether modern man, distracted and overwhelmed by himself and by the world, can still regain the original integrity of his soul.

Whatever be the weakness and decadence of the West, it still has one saving glory: the University is free, the Church is free. It is a great thing to preserve unbroken the tradition of free inquiry started by Plato and Aristotle, and the tradition of love started by God.

Truth can still be sought and God can still be loved and proclaimed, in joy and freedom.

And this fact alone is going to save us. It will not be by pacts, or by atomic bombs, or by economic arrangements, or by the United Nations, that peace will be established, but by the freedom of the Church and the University each to be itself. Communism does not know what it has done when it subjected the Church and the University to its own dictates.

We hope and pray that there will develop in the Western world a mighty spiritual movement which will rediscover and reaffirm its glorious hidden values, and fulfil mankind's longing for a more just order of things, a more beautiful world, a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Modern man sees before him the possibility of universal plenty for the first time in history, and grasps at any doctrine which seems to promise him the fulfilment of his dream. To ask of Communism to change its nature, without satisfying the need to which it is a response, is to offer the world not bread, but a stone.

Communism is a doctrine of despair. Its only and complete answer therefore lies in the existence of hope. If the Western world can show a way to eradicate the shame and scandal of poverty, of exploitation, of oppression, of greed, without resort to social revolution and class-struggle and dictatorship: if it can place these material values in their proper subordinate place within the context of a mighty spiritual movement which will be revolutionary without being subversive and which will draw its substance from the infinite riches of the Western positive tradition, then the necessity for Communism will vanish, and the spectre which now walks the earth will be laid forever.