

BAPTIST FEATURES

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NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

127 NINTH AVE., N., NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE AL 4-1631

W. C. Fields, *Director*

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Editor's Note: A great wave of concern about communism has recently been evident throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. At the invitation of the Christian Life Commission, Dr. Paul Geren was asked to prepare a special report on communism for Southern Baptists.

Dr. Geren's service at home and abroad has provided unusual opportunities to study and observe communism. In 1959 he traveled extensively in the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia. While Executive Vice President of Baylor University, 1956-59, he established the Comparative Studies in Christianity and Communism there in addition to the J. M. Dawson Studies in Church and State.

Paul Geren was born in Arkansas and raised there and in Texas where his Baptist preacher father held pastorates. He has his A.B. from Baylor (1936) where he was president of the B. S. U. and his Ph. D. from Harvard (1941). During World War II he served in the China-Burma-India Theater and was decorated with the bronze star for action behind Japanese lines. He has taught at L. S. U., Berea College, Baylor, S. M. U., Judson College in Rangoon, Burma and Forman Christian College in Lahore, Pakistan. From 1947-56 he served as a U. S. diplomat in India, Syria, Jordan and the Department of State. When asked by the Christian Life Commission to prepare this study, he was the Executive Director of the Dallas Council on World Affairs. In March, 1961 he was recalled to the diplomatic service.

First in a Series of Four

Throwing a Searchlight on Communism

Cancer of Communism
Requires Close Study

by Paul Geren

"We will bury you. Your grandchildren will live under socialism. The victory of communism is historically irrevocable."

Nikita Khrushchev, strongman in the USSR (Russia), expresses communism's own brand of predestination in prophecies like these.

Intelligence and patriotism cause us to react sharply to such statements. A Christian has additional reasons for concern which proceed from his faith. Communism professes to be atheistic, but in reality it wants to displace other religions. It has its own idols, or gods.

It presumes to answer the ultimate questions of life and death, good and evil. It demands of the Communist party member the devotion which Christians believe belongs to God alone.

Would the Communists like to subvert our churches? We have good evidence to believe so. A small vocal group are convinced this has already taken place!

Since 1917, when it was only an idea in the minds of wild men, the Communist movement has gained control of one-fourth the land area of this planet excluding the Antarctic, and almost a billion people, one-third of the world's total. Communism is the state power in over a dozen nations.

Why should Baptists study Communism? These are some of the reasons. We begin by studying communism as a medical student studies cancer. Many see communism and Christianity as the two remaining serious contenders for men's minds and devotions.

By studying factual reports on communism we begin our close examination. Through this and three succeeding articles, we hope to shed light on communism. The light by which we study is the Christian faith. Concentrated study may help us to heal and even to find the means of preventing this malady of our time.

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Communists reject God for themselves and either hate or pity believers. "Every idea of a god, even flirting with the idea of god is unutterable vileness," Lenin said. The philosophy on which they base this negative and dogmatic position is called dialectical materialism which Lenin summarized: "There is nothing in the universe except matter and its motion."

Everything intangible or unseen is derived from matter. Communists mock a passage of Scripture such as John 4:24, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," by saying God doesn't exist if he is only spirit and has no material body.

Three comments may help avoid oversimplifying Communist atheism. First, its tone is not as militant as formerly. Khrushchev is quoted in official Soviet reports as having made 17 references to God, the Bible or the Christian religion during his 1959 visit to the U. S. These included: "God be with you." "Carry on and God bless you." "We offer thanks to God so to say." "...you and we are also in a way brothers in Christ." When questioned about these references, Khrushchev described them as "a way of speaking."

Many fellow Christians are living under Communist rule. The Russian Baptists are the second largest Christian group in the USSR with 5400 churches and more than half a million acknowledged members.

Second, Communist atheism is not so much a distinctive faith as a tool for propaganda against a social system which the Communists hate. By means of their atheism they attack the churches and the preachers for promising "pie in the sky by and by."

Christians are wise to understand this confrontation is more than a formal debate in which Communists say, "There is no god," and Christians reply, "Oh yes, there is a God." This is a pervasive struggle which includes what atheists and believers do for the oppressed. "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16) is Christ's judgment on Christians as well as Communists.

Third, Communists have idols. The first of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," (Exod. 20:3) pronounces against the persistent tendency in men towards idolatry. Men's idols will range from Baal to ballistics. Communist idols include the Party, Science, Power, Surpassing the United States and even the bodies of Lenin and Stalin, the "gruesome twosome" on exhibition in Red Square.

What can such a system believe about the rights of an individual man, whose rights Christians say are God-given? The second in the series of study on communism will help us see this point more clearly.

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Second in a Series of Four

Throwing a Searchlight on Communism

Communists Thrive On Poverty, Catastrophes

by Paul Geren

When Lenin, the late Communist Party leader, was a young man (in 1892), a famine came to Samara, the district in Russia where Lenin lived. Being from a privileged family, he did not suffer from the famine but neither did he help relieve it.

"Being in this sense inevitable, famine today performs a progressive function," Lenin wrote. Following in his train, Communists today treat all catastrophes, crimes and mistakes as an opportunity to advance their cause.

Their cause may place the "gruesome twosome," Lenin and Stalin, in a mausoleum in Red Square in Moscow where long lines of quiet people file by to view their remains. However, their attitude toward living man is vastly different.

Their view of individual man shows that what men believe about God controls what they believe about themselves. Communists say man consists precisely of the matter of his body. Neither man nor anything else in the universe was created, they maintain.

They reject the Bible and its Genesis account of creation. A Christian, by contrast, will think on Gen. 1:1, "In the beginning God created..." and on Gen. 1:27, "So God created man in his own image..." Believing this about creation, Christians must treat man as one made in the image of God, each man unique, precious, inviolate in personality.

Another contrast concerns the relationship of the individual and society. Christian faith is not first of all a system of ethics but a surrender and discipleship to Jesus Christ. Christians believe society is significant because it is an aggregate of individual persons.

Communists emphasize that individual life has its meaning from society, speaking of "mankind," whereas the Bible speaks of "this man," "a certain man" and "a man called John." The person in the Bible may be a king, a poor man, a lawyer or a slave, but he is always confronted as one who must decide this day whom he will serve.

Our society has drawn heavily from this view of man. Communist doctrine, by contrast, is much preoccupied with classes, class struggle, the classless society, the dictatorship of the proletariat (as the working classes are called) and destruction of the bourgeoisie (as the owning classes are known).

The same contrast is present in the analysis of evil in men and the proposed redemption.

In the Christian view, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), and "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Man's fault is in the personal center of decision and it is there that salvation is received.

Communists claim the root of evil is not in the hearts of men but in a social arrangement. This arrangement is known as private ownership of the means of production. Once this basic evil is eliminated they believe a new society will emerge, first as socialism, then to perfection as communism.

Communists rely on the new society to produce new men. Christians find the hope of a new society in the hearts of new creatures in Christ Jesus.

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What Christians should do and should not do depends on their commitment to Christ. Their following Christ determines the rules of conduct rather than the other way around. Christian ethics are centered in Christ.

Communism reverses the words of Christ, who declared, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The political system, the economic system and the social system--Christians believe--are all made for man, not man for the systems.

The Hungarian revolt and all the other purges and crushings of people evidence how tragically Communists have reversed Christ's rule...how they hold to the rule that the person serves the system. Communism believes any means is blessed if it serves the purpose of communism.

Communism, however, is not primarily a system of ethics but a program for bringing Communist world revolution. Lenin expounded its ethics: "We say: morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting system and to unite all the toilers around the proletariat, which is creating a new Communist society....We do not believe in an eternal morality."

This absence of an eternal morality permits every situation of suffering to be exploited for the Communist cause. If the Communists have succeeded famously, a part of the explanation is that many of us who claim the name of Christian have been satisfied to live in comfort and leave the world's suffering millions to the Communists.

As their rule is "Do all things for communism," the Christian rule is "Do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). The glory of God in respect to suffering men is that we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and prisoners and welcome the stranger.

If communism is atheistic, if it rejects the personal freedom and dignity of man, what is its stand on the churches? Aren't there Baptists in Russia today? How does their presence jibe with atheism and exaltation of the State? The third in the series turns the beam on this phase of life under communism.

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Russian Baptists Can't
Plant New Congregation

by Paul Geren

With our emphasis on church extension, Southern Baptists are concerned about under-churched areas.

Suppose you lived in Moscow, under the rule of the Communists. Russian Baptists may have a church only on the authorization of Soviet officials. These officials must allocate a site and building for the church.

The officials thus far allow only one Baptist place of worship per community, even in Moscow with its five million people.

We Americans can buy land and build churches wherever we please, subject to zoning regulations and our financial ability. In Dallas, Texas, for example, with less than one million, there are more than 200 Baptist churches. These churches have education buildings, even recreation facilities.

Russian Baptists, on the other hand, are confined to the church building for their services and may not have meetings on the streets or in a tent or in the Kremlin. They may have only one type of service which includes preaching, praying, reading the Bible and singing.

They can not have a Sunday school. No one may become a member of a Baptist church there before he is 18 years old.

Printing may be done on behalf of churches only by specific allocation of presses which are in charge of state officials. Churches may not maintain libraries or reading rooms and may not give medical or charitable aid. There is no Russian Baptist seminary.

Russian Baptists do not knowingly take a Communist into their membership nor does the Communist party in the USSR (Russia) receive a believer.

"It is not to be tolerated that even the smallest manifestation of religiousness should be observed among Communists," a Party document declares.

Russian Baptists are loyal to the government of their country. They serve in the military forces. Most of their jobs can be described as state jobs since the state is the sole employer.

Under the tsars Baptists suffered a persecution from the established Russian Orthodox Church. Since the Communist Revolution in 1917, their number has grown from 100,000 to more than 500,000 church members. Neither their fathers of the tsarist era nor they of the Communist era have lived under conditions of religious freedom as Americans define it.

The Communist Party is superior to the State in the Soviet Union. It directs the State. Article 126 of the Soviet Constitution declares the Party is "the vanguard of the working people in their struggle to build Communist society and is the leading core of all organizations of the working people, both public and state."

A Soviet election is a "race with one horse."

Voters have only one candidate--the Communist Party candidate, for whom most of the people vote, "Yes."

Since virtually all economic activity is owned and controlled by the state, the Party likewise controls the economy, as it does education.

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The leader in the Soviet Union is such by virtue of his position in the Party and not by virtue of the government office he may hold. Khrushchev, for example, did not become chairman of the Council of Ministers in the government until January, 1958 but his predominance was assured from late 1953 when he was named first secretary of the Party.

Only eight million of the 210 million people in the USSR (Russia) belong to the Party, less than 4 per cent. There are more Southern Baptists in the U. S. than Communist Party members in the Soviet Union.

The Party membership is composed chiefly of plant and farm managers, technicians, engineers, government functionaries and military officers. They know and announce the Party line. As leaders in management, information and propaganda, they enjoy special privileges.

Membership in the Party is not easy. First a candidate must be nominated by three Party members who take responsibility for their nominee. The candidate must then serve a probationary period of two years or longer.

During this time the candidate is expected to perform good works and demonstrate his fitness for the Party. A question which troubles many of us is: Are the Communists showing greater devotion to their idol than a generation of relaxed Christians show to Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life?

How should Baptists in the United States feel toward Russian Baptists? First, we should not prescribe what they should do any more than they should tell us what to do in our differing circumstances. Second, we should recognize their sincerity in the measure we are able to observe and test it. Third, we should welcome all opportunities of fellowship and cooperation with them in the Baptist World Alliance. Our respective governments are in communication at a diplomatic level. Should Baptists of the USSR and the U. S. who testify to redemption by the same Lord do less?

What can Christians do about communism? Read next week's concluding installment for some attitudes toward and action against communism which we can form.

Fourth and Final of Series...

Throwing a Searchlight on Communism

Dream of Own Business?
In Soviet Union, Nyet!

by Paul Geren

When a Russian worker is paid, he may deposit his money in the bank or he may buy government bonds with it at interest. But invest it privately with the hope of some day going into business for himself? Not at all.

His counterpart in America, on the other hand, may save his money, accumulate funds and establish his own business. Whether he succeeds will depend on whether people buy his product.

What is the difference? In the Soviet Union, only the State has the right to employ. It may be viewed as one vast state corporation owning and controlling everything.

The standard of living enjoyed in the United States is about four times that of the Soviet people.

According to testimony offered in the hearings before the Joint Economic Committee of the 86th Congress, the American economy produces about 2-1/2 times as much as the Soviet economy, and we devote 86 per cent of the national product to consumption as compared to 59 per cent for the Soviets.

There are important qualitative differences also. Americans are free to spend their incomes as they like and to consume as they like. When we buy a certain item, we in effect vote for its production. When we refuse to buy an item, we vote against its production.

Soviet consumers may buy only what the central planners decide to produce for them. They may buy it only in the quantities determined by the central planners.

Several items--housing is one--are not offered on the market but are assigned by officials so that the consumer's power is determined not by his ability to pay but by his influence with the officials.

Of goods offered on the market, the writer can testify from his travels in the Soviet Union that supply is short, the selection limited, prices high and marketing methods primitive.

The turnover tax is 73 per cent of the retail price of sugar, 50 per cent of the retail price of kitchenware. In order to buy a pair of men's shoes, the average worker must work 12.3 days and to buy a wool suit, 4.4 weeks.

By contrast with the state-employed Soviet Union workman, in the American economy a person may choose to be self-employed or to work for one of several million employers.

If an American belongs to a labor union, he will expect his union to bargain with management for wages and working conditions. In the Soviet Union, the State sets wages, fixes hours and determines working conditions. Labor unions there have only a cultural and recreational purpose.

Does the Bible speak on the subject of economy? While it does not ordain a particular economic organization, many of its teachings are relevant to the economic situation.

Christians have lived in a variety of economic systems--slavery, feudalism, capitalism, state capitalism, socialism, state socialism and communism. The Christian faith, however, is above economics just as it is above race and above nation. The faith can make a fellowship of believers from all races, nations and economic systems.

This does not make it impossible for a Christian to render judgments concerning economic systems. Christians in the United States will not hesitate in judging between a free enterprise system and the economic totalitarianism characteristic of the Soviet Union and Communist China.

The free enterprise system gives us more freedom as persons and more freedom in the churches. As practiced in the United States, religious freedom requires the right to buy land, erect churches, print tracts, establish schools, offices. These rights are not available in the USSR.

What can Christians do about communism?

1. We can seek to learn through serious study what communism is and how it operates. This report is a beginning in that direction.

2. We can exercise a proper guard against Communist subversion of institutions including churches. Just as we are wary of those who say there is no danger to us from communism, we must likewise beware of those who profess to see Communists everywhere and whose weapon is character assassination.

There are approximately 10,000 members of the Communist Party in the United States. Employing Mr. J. Edgar Hoover's estimate of 10 fellow travelers to every Party member, we arrive at a total of 110,000 Americans who are in some way serving the cause of communism--one out of every 1800 Americans.

Imagine the havoc and harm in our Baptist churches if we encounter each person with the challenge:

"Before I shake hands with you I must have evidence you are not a Communist!"

There is a better way and a better challenge:

"Will you follow the Saviour and Lord?"

3. We can, through prayer, self-sacrifice and responsible Christian citizenship, lend our support to those programs of our foreign mission enterprise and of our own government which seek to help the underprivileged of the world. If we can help these down-trodden masses to achieve some of the goals they desperately want, then communism's glib promises will no longer have such magnetic appeal.

We can accomplish this through economic aid, education, land reform and the extension of the basic ideals of democracy and Christianity.

4. There is a supremely important point: Our mightiest act against communism is deepening our Christian life and discipleship, each according to his own unique personal experience of Christ.

We say our "No!" to communism when we say our "Yes!" to Jesus Christ. We must recapture the vitality of our Christian faith.

If Christianity is to meet the challenge of contemporary communism, individual Christians must "outlive, outthink, outdo and outdie" the Communists.

Editors: The following pgh is for use at your discretion.

Would you like extra copies or quantities of Dr. Geren's study of communism? If so, write Christian Life Commission of Southern Baptist Convention, 161-8th Ave. No., Nashville, Tenn.