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Scared To Death
Or Christian Life?

(Editor's Note: This is the fourth and final of the Christian Life Commission features.)

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"There are no atheists in foxholes."

This phrase became popular during World War II. The idea is that fear of destruction during warfare makes a believer of the man who had hitherto ignored God.

During recent years, a kind of "foxhole philosophy" has developed which contends that the way to urge men to serve God is to describe the horrors of the foxhole so vividly that they will respond.

The psychological foxholes may vary from nuclear holocaust to Communist domination, but the eloquent description of the evil is designed to incite men to service to God by appeals to fear.

How does fear relate to a man's dedication to God?

Appeals to fear have always been a part of the message of the pulpit and lecture platform. Modern sophisticated congregations hear little of the descriptions of the flames of eternal hell which characterized the pulpit of yesterday.

The present-day prophet finds plenty of material for this same effect by describing the death-dealing blast of nuclear explosion. The heat and radiation fallout are portrayed vividly with a closing appeal to share the gospel as the best guarantee against nuclear holocaust.

The text becomes "The fear of the H-bomb constraineth me."

Another appeal to fear paints the purple curtain of Roman Catholicism as a threat capable of snuffing out the light of the Gospel. In tracing the evils of religious persecution in Spain and Colombia or reviewing the Spanish Inquisition, the speaker pleads, "If we don't win them, the Catholics will."

The text becomes, "The fear of Romanism constraineth me."

Perhaps the most effective appeal to fear centers in the spectre of communism. Startling statistics can be cited about the gains of communism in the past few decades. Communists are demonstrating a remarkable dedication to their cause of world revolution.

Concentrating upon taking over the world, they are using internal confusion and infiltration as one of the tactics of their conquest. They are capable of any degree of deception in order to win in the struggle. With these facts to cite, the eloquent appeal is made to serve Christ or the Communists will win.

The text becomes, "The fear of communism constraineth me."

It would be unrealistic to minimize any of these threats.

No world citizen can get away from the haunting memory of the mushroom cloud of Hiroshima. No believer in religious liberty can forget the avowed purpose of the Roman hierarchy to allow only their version of the truth to be heard wherever they are in domination. No genuine Christian can fail to feel the challenge of communism to his deepest beliefs.

However, there should be a real searching of heart at the point of making any of these reasons the motivation for service to Christ. Should one serve Christ because he is afraid of the loss of his culture, of his fortune or even of his life?

Fear is not the right motive for service.

The stimulus of fear is short-lived. Like adrenalin in the body, it can produce heroic efforts for a brief time, but the human mind is incapable of maintaining a pitch of hysteria without cracking under the strain. It is self-defeating.

Negative reactions are the basis for the motivation of fear. The result is often an attitude of frustration manifested in suspicion, hatred or animosity.

There is a kind of fear which should be in every Christian's experience. This fear centers not in men but in God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This fear is an awesome respect for the power and majesty of God. It will drive out lesser fears.

When one becomes aware of God's power to perform his promises, he realizes that God is perfectly capable of accomplishing his purpose despite the opposition of men.

Paul summed up the driving force in his life by saying, "The love of Christ constraineth me." (2 Cor. 5:14).

Christians should witness with urgency of word and consistency of convictions. This witness should come not because of the danger that some other cause will capture men, but because God loves them.

Integrity should be reestablished and justice done not because inner moral decay threatens Western culture but because God is pleased with truthfulness and is concerned for justice. While Christians should be concerned about the fact that the Communists are exploiting inconsistencies between Christian behavior and Christian profession, the deepest reason for repentance should be love for the Christ who is hurt by men's failure to follow him.

Service should be motivated not by the fear of men but by the love of Christ.

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Cutlines

FIRST BUILT--Pastor Walter C. Heilig, right, points out to Area Missionary Charles E. Magruder of Buffalo, N. Y., that Amherst Baptist Church was the first new building constructed for Southern Baptists in New York state. Church is located in suburb of Buffalo, contains 5648 square feet. Membership is 116. Many Southern Baptist churches in area buy former plants of Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian churches. (BP) Photo