But again there is a decisive difference. Because Communists believe that sin arises out of a particular environment, they believe that sin can be removed by changing man's environment. But Christians believe that sin arises in the heart of man and can be removed only by the grace of God. Why, the Christian asks the Communist, did exploitation arise with an economic change unless first the desire to exploit was present in the hearts of men? But if the desire to exploit exists in the hearts of men, will it not find new means of expression even with a new economic system? Again, Christians are convinced that events in communist countries verify this Christian belief.

A striking similarity between Christianity and communism is that both see history guided by a power greater than man, which is leading to the victory of the good. For Christians, of course, this is the providence of God. For Communists it is dialectical materialism. Christians look forward to the coming of the kingdom of God as God's final defeat of sin and death. Communists believe that inevitably communism will free the world of class struggle, oppression, and exploitation.

The radical difference between the two faiths at this point is that for the Christian the power behind the victory of the good is the loving will of God the Creator. For Communists it is the dark, mindless force of dialectical materialism. Because Christians believe that a loving God controls history, they see value in each individual and his destiny to share in God's ultimate victory.

But Communists see no value in the individual as such; his value depends upon the class to which he belongs and the part he can play in the social revolution. Since dialectical materialism lays aside individuals in its relentless development, the Communist does not hesitate to use men and to discard them when it serves his purpose. Because communism believes that it is based on a scientific study of the laws of nature, it has no need of ethics. Christians, dedicated to doing the will of God, see all decisions as having ethical dimensions.

Communism's Appeals and Defects

Historically the term "communism" meant the ideal society in which men would live as brothers. It was practiced by the early Christians (Acts 4:32-33) and has remained in Christianity as the ideal of the kingdom of God.

A second meaning of "communism," and the predominant meaning today, refers to the theory developed by Marx and Engels and turned into reality by Lenin, Stalin, and the world-wide communist organization of today. This movement takes the age-old dream and makes a "science" out of it. In the process the dream turns into a nightmare through the concepts of class struggle, revolution, and dictatorship by the proletariat.

Seeing this twofold meaning of communism helps us understand the struggle with communism. The appeal of communism to the hearts of men lies in its preaching of the historic ideals of communism—peace, justice, equality, and brotherhood. From the Christian perspective the weakness of communism is not that it preaches such ideals. Its weakness is that its methods destroy the dream that it preaches. Instead of building a brotherly society, it sets man against man, builds a dictatorship by the Communist Party, and introduces new forms of injustice and exploitation.

Often today we assume that any group that is anticommunist ought to be supported. But Christians cannot be simply against something; they are first of all for the will of God. Furthermore, many anticommunists are not opposed to the inequality, exploitation, and suppression of freedom that communism brings, for they support such evils elsewhere. Their opposition is rooted in the fact that communism preaches brotherhood, equality, and peace. Christians must always oppose such anticommunists.

Christians must come to see in communism a deep judgment upon the failures of the church. Communism has grown to power in our world because it holds out hope to the hungry, the poor, the naked, and the dispossessed. Those who have lived in misery have not evaluated communism when it has appeared with its promise of salvation. But where such conditions exist, it is, in part, because Christians have forgotten their Lord's command to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

And yet, we would miss the real nature of our times and fall into the communist error itself if we assumed that the problem of today is purely economic. Christianity does not ignore the economic problem. When men were hungry, Jesus fed them. But Christianity knows, as communism does not, that man does not live by bread alone. Strangely enough, a deep appeal of communism has been as a religion that gave man a sense of hope and a meaning for life by dedicating himself to something greater than himself. At the same time, Christianity too often has sunk into a complacent respectability with no hint of a great task to perform. The spiritual needs of man cannot be fed indefinitely upon an opiate; where Christianity has become that, communism has won.

In the last analysis, however, communism is an opiate. Even if it finally meets the economic problems of its people, as it probably will, it must still learn that man does not live by bread alone. There is evidence that youth, raised upon continual communist propaganda, are seeking what communism cannot give. Communism, we have argued, is a false religion, an idolatry. All idolatries get their opportunity from the fact that man was created to worship God. When man does not know the true God, he worships an idol. But, because man was not created to worship idols, idolatry always destroys itself. The Christian answer to communism is thus not an arid anticommunism; it is rather the life that stands for and lives the full Christian faith with its challenge and hope for all men.

"Adult Teacher"

The *Adult Teacher,* September, 1962, official publication of the Methodist Church, provided an article, "Christianity, Communism, and History," as supplemental material for use with its Adult Fellowship Series. Here we are told, "Christianity and communism are comparable because both are essentially religious interpretations of history. . . . It is because communism is a rival religion that the Christian finds it incompatible with his faith."

Not a Religion

Communism is not, never has been, and never will be a religion. It is interesting to observe that virtually all of those who accept the John C. Bennett dictum of the "half truth of Communism" want to make of Communism a religion, give it a standing which it does not deserve and cannot have.

The fuller significance of this, however, is seen as one reads in the article the discussion of the "twofold meaning of Communism." First, there is the historical, and, second, there is the predominant meaning today.

We are told: "Historically, the term 'communism' meant the ideal society in which men would live as brothers. It was practiced by the early Christians (Acts 4:32-33) and has remained in Christianity as the ideal of the kingdom of God."

Nothing could be further from the teaching of the Bible. Communism is *not* the "ideal of the kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God is not a society; it is a spiritual order, entrance into which is by the miracle of the new birth. The early Christians did not practice Communism. What they had in the fourth chapter of Acts had nothing to do with the State or its control of the means and instruments of production. What happened there was that the church