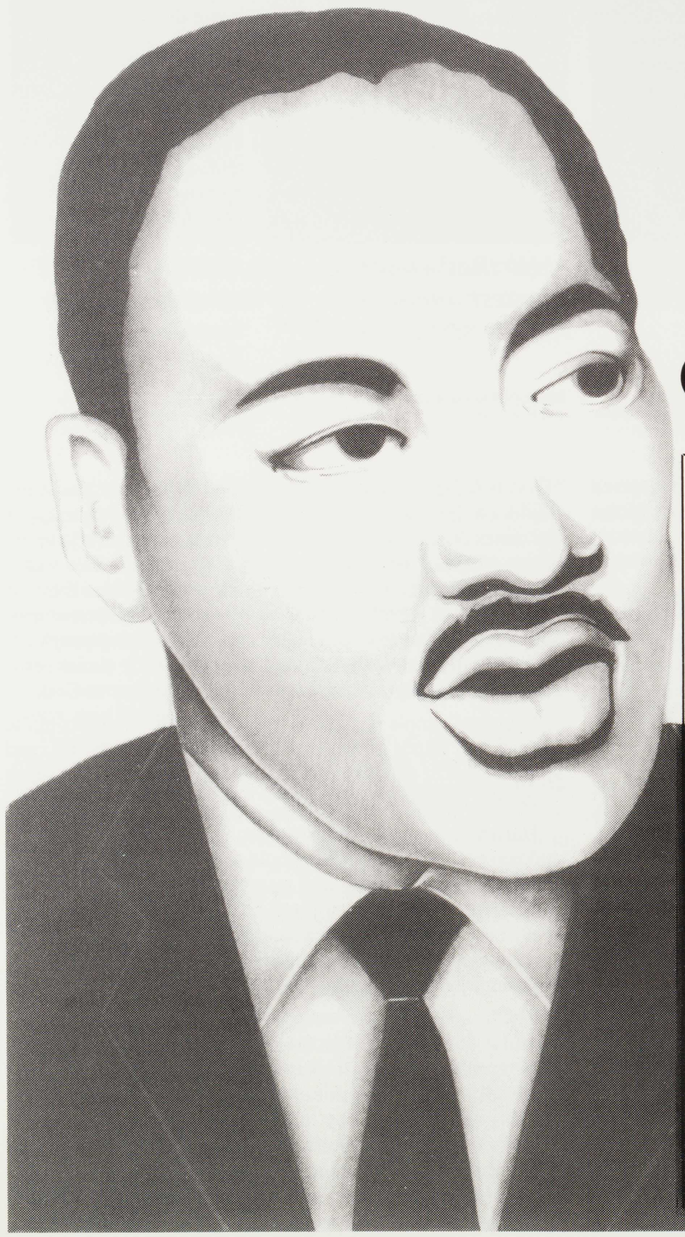
CAUSA MINISTERIAL ALLIANCE OF HARLEM

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Sermon

Why a CHRISTIAN Cannot be a COMMUNIST



Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.
Amos 5:24.

Few issues demand a more thorough and sober discussion than the one presented by Communism. For at least three reasons, every Christian minister should feel obligated to speak to his people on this issue.

The first reason recognizes that the widespread influence of Communism has, like a mighty title wave, spread through Russia, China, Eastern Europe, and even to our hemisphere. Nearly one billion people in the world believe in it, many of whom embracing it as a new religion to which they have surrendered. Such a force cannot be ignored.

A second reason is that Communism is the only serious rival to Christianity. Such great world religions as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Mohammedanism are possible alternatives to Christianity are fundamentally incompatible. *A true Christian cannot be a true Communist for the two philosophies are antithetical and all the dialectics of the logicians cannot reconcile them.* Why is this true?

First, Communism is based on a materialistic and humanistic view of life and history. According to Communist theory, matter, not mind or spirit, speaks the last word in the universe. Such a philosophy is avowedly secularistic and atheistic. Under it, God is merely a figment of the imagination, religion is a product of fear and ignorance, and the church is an invention of the rulers to control the masses. Moreover, *Communism, like humanism, thrives on the grand illusion that man, unaided by any divine power, can save himself and usher in a new society.*

I fight alone, and win or sink
I need no one to make me free
I want no Jesus Christ to think,
That he could ever die for me.

Cold atheism wrapped in the garments of materialism, Communism provides no place for God or Christ.

At the center of the Christian faith is the affirmation that there is a God in the universe who is the ground and essence of all reality. A Being of infinite love and boundless power, God is the creator, sustenance, and conserver of values. In opposition to Communism's atheistic materialism, Christianity poses a theistic idealism. Reality cannot be explained by matter in motion or the push and pull of economic forces. *Christianity affirms that at the heart of reality there is a heart, a loving father who works through history for the salvation of his children.* Man cannot save himself, for man is not the measure of all things and humanity is not God. Bound by the chains of his own sin and finiteness, man needs a Savior.

Second, communism is based on ethical relativism and accepts no stable moral absolutes. Right and wrong are relative to the most expedient methods for dealing with class war. Communism exploits the dreadful philosophy that the end justifies the means. It enunciates movingly the theory of a classless society, but alas! Its methods for achieving this noble end are all too often ignoble. Lying, violence, murder, and torture are considered to be justifiable means to achieve the millennial end. Is this an unfair indictment? Listen to the words of Lenin, the real tactician of Communist theory: "We must be ready to emplOy trickery, deceit, lawbreaking, withholding and concealing truth." Modern history has known many torturous nights and horror-filled days because his followers have taken this statement seriously.

In contrast to the ethical relativism of Communism, Christianity sets forTH a system of absolute moral values and affirms that God has placed within the very structure of this universe certain moral principles that are fixed and immutable. The law of love as an imperative is the norm for all of man's actions. Furthermore, Christianity at its best refuses to live by a philosophy of ends justifying means. Destructive means cannot bring constructive ends, because the means represent the ideal in the making and the-end-in-progress. Immoral means cannot bring moral ends, for the ends are pre-existent in the means.

Third, Communism attributes ultimate value to the state. Man is made for the state and not the state for man. One may object, saying that in Communist theory the state is an "interim reality," which will "wither away" when the classless society emerges. True—in theory; but it is also true that, while it lasts, the state is the end. Man is a means to that end. Man has no inalienable rights. His only rights are derived from, and conferred by, the state. Under such a system, the foundation of freedom runs dry. Restricted are man's liberties to vote, and his freedom to listen and to read. Art, religion, education, music and science come under the gripping yoke of governmental control. Man must be a dutiful servant to the omnipotent state.

All of this is contrary, not only to the Christian doctrine of God, but also to the Christian estimate of man. Christianity insists that man is an end because he is a child of God, made in God's image. Man is more than a producing animal guided by economic forces; he is a being of spirit, crowned with glory and honor, endowed with the gift of freedom. The ultimate weakness of Communism is that it robs man of that quality which makes him man. Man, says Paul Tillich, is man because he is free. This freedom is expressed through man's capacity to deliberate, decide, and respond. Under Communism, the individual soul is shackled by the chains of conformity; his spirit is bound by the manacles of party allegiance. He is stripped of

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both conscience and reason. The trouble with Communism is it has neither a theology nor a Christology, therefore it emerges with a mixed-up anthropology. Confused about God, it is also confused about man. In spite of its glowing talk about the welfare of the masses, Communism's methods and philosophy strip man of his dignity and worth, leaving him a little more than a depersonalized cog in the ever-turning wheel of the state.

Clearly, then all of this is out of harmony with the Christian view of things. We must not fool ourselves. These systems of thought are too contradictory to be reconciled; they represent diametrically opposed ways of looking at the world and of transforming it. *We should as Christians pray for the Communists constantly, but never can we, as true Christians, tolerate the philosophy of Communism.*

Yet, something in the spirit and threat of Communism challenges us. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, referred to Communism as Christian heresy. He meant that Communism had laid hold on certain truths which are essential parts of the Christian view of things, although bound to them are theories and practices which no Christian could ever accept.