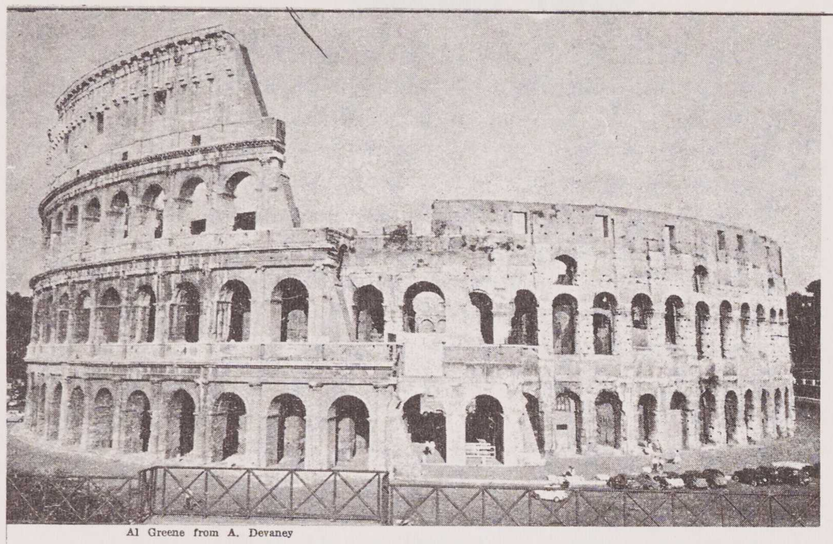

Al Greene from A. Devaney

How will history deal with us? Will this be the fate of our great gladiatorial arenas?

(Photographically reproduced from Adult Teacher of September, 1962)

BY WILLIAM HORDERN

Christianity, Communism, and History

Publication of this analysis of communist theory in no way constitutes an endorsement of communism

(This article is supplemental material for use with the Adult Fellowship Series, beginning on page 25.)

THE East-West struggle takes many forms—military, economic, political, diplomatic—but basic to all the struggles is that for the faith, loyalty, and commitment of men. It is to this facet of the struggle that we turn when we compare Christianity and communism.

Christianity and communism are comparable because both are essentially religious interpretations of history. Some people object to calling communism a religion because, to such people, the term "religion" implies something good and desirable; and these people find communism evil. Communists reject this description because they claim that it is their goal to free all men from religion.

But if we think of religion as a man's commitment to that which is ultimate for deciding his life and action, it is clear that communism fills the place of religion in the lives of dedicated Communists. Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that the real enemy of God is not irreligion but false religion—idolatry. It is because communism is a rival religion that the Christian finds it incompatible with his faith.

That communism is an interpretation of history is obvious, but it is not always so obvious that Christianity also is. Communists have charged that Christianity is an opiate of the people that denies meaning to history by turning man's eyes to a heavenly salvation beyond this earth and thus puts him to sleep so that he accepts earthly injustice without a murmur. Unfortunately Christianity often has fallen into this pattern, which is alien to the essence of Christian faith.

The Bible shows us that it is in history that God makes the primary revelation of himself. Biblical salvation is not the promise of flight from history but a promise for history. The Bible shows man's history founded in God's creation of the world and moving toward an end that is not merely "finis" but a fulfillment and a goal. God's purpose is working through history despite man's rebellion against God's will.

Because the command to feed the hungry and clothe the naked is central to Christian faith (Matthew 25:31-46), Christians cannot pass by on the other side of need. Christians do not believe that the end of earthly life is the end of a man, but they do believe that the future life will be a fulfillment of this life so that what happens in this life has eternal significance.

Communist Theory

We find that dialectical materialism is central to communist belief. It is materialistic in that it denies the existence of any god, mind, or values apart from matter. But its materialism is dialectical, for it sees the world in continual change that arises through conflict.

Although the Communist sees all of nature pervaded by dialectical struggle, it is in history that this struggle reaches its climax. Man's history is determined by economic factors. That is, before man can think, act, have a religion or a philosophy, he must eat, drink, be clothed and housed. Every society has a mode of production by which it supplies the physical necessities of life. Upon this mode of production rest all of man's activities so that his life and thought is governed by its economic base. When the mode of production changes, the whole of man's thinking and acting change.

History is seen by Communists to have passed through several stages. At first man lived in a primitive communism where the whole tribe ruled themselves by popular vote, owned all things in common, and had no oppression. Into this idyllic scene came a change in production that made private ownership of property and slaves a profitable venture. The slave economy appeared, with government in the hands of a few who exploited the rest. This was replaced eventually by feudalism, in which the serfs were exploited by the landowners.

According to Marxist theory another change in production brought the system known as capitalism, the present form of exploitation. Capitalists, who own the means of production, control the whole of society and make fortunes by exploiting those who must work for them or starve. Capitalists make their profits because they pay the workers the equivalent of what the worker produces in part of the day and keep the rest of the produce for themselves. This is called "surplus value."

But, according to the Communists, capitalism is doomed, for modes of production have changed so that the victory of the proletariat (workers) is inevitable. When the workers of the world unite in revolt, they will take over the government and inaugurate the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the present stage of all communist countries. But, according to the theory, it is meant to last only a brief period before the state will wither away because there will be no class to use it to exploit other classes. The period of communism will dawn when every man will receive according to his need and give according to his ability. There will be no more exploitation, for all will belong to the same class.

Comparison

Communists believe that man fell from the golden age of primitive communism because he acquired private property. Thus they believe that if they abolish private property the ideal age will return. But Christians believe that man fell because he sinned. He centered his life on himself and did not love God and his neighbor. Thus, even if private property were removed, Christians believe that man would find new ways to exploit his fellow men. Life in communist countries illustrates this, for the Communist Party has become an exploiter of men.

Again Christians and Communists agree in seeing the whole of life tainted with the effects of sin. Christians see that, because of sin, mankind is divided into classes and races that struggle to assert their power over each other. Men's philosophies and religions are perverted by their selfish interests in life. Thus Christians can agree that religion sometimes becomes the opiate of the people.

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