

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE "FAR RIGHT"

Preached by William G. Kirk - March 18, 1962

Barrington Methodist Church

(This sermon has been made available at the request of the Christian Social Concerns Commission.)

Text: I John 4:1- - "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

INTRODUCTION

Nearly a year ago I mailed reprints of an article concerning the movie "Operation Abolition" which had appeared in the Christian Century to members of our church. A week later I received a letter from a strange woman in Chicago (not a member) who had seen one of these reprints. She accused me of aiding the Communists and advised that I become a follower of a one Dr. Fred Schwarz from Australia who was the leader of the "Christian Anti-Communist Crusade." This was my first personal contact with the "Far Right" movements.

What do we mean by the 'Far Right?' Let me first say very definitely that I do not define the Far Right as those who hold a conservative political position; I mean that conservative position commonly represented by the Republican Party whose leaders (Eisenhower, Nixon, -the hopeful George Romney and others) have condemned the extremists on the Right. We do mean by this term those fanatical extremists "way out" on the right of the political fence.

This morning we are specifically referring to the following groups: (1.) "The Christian Anti-Communist Crusade" led by Dr. Fred Schwarz; (2.) "The John Birch Society" led by the paranoid candymaker Robert Welch; (3.) "The Christian Crusade" led by the Tulsa, Oklahoma evangelist Billy James Hargis, (4.) "The Church League of America" led by Edgar C. Bundy of Wheaton, Illinois. These are representative groups of the 'Far Right' extremists.

For several weeks I have debated whether or not to deal with these groups in a sermon. I wondered if they "were worth it." With most of the present leadership, such as Robert Welch and General Walker, most of the groups are harmless. California's States Attorney Stanley Mosk expressed it well when he once described the John Birch Society as being composed of "retired army officers and little old ladies in tennis shoes." However with intellectually capable leadership they could become seriously dangerous. Since the movements are still growing and many Christian people are being misled by them I have decided they demand attention. In many communities nearby they are causing quite a disturbance.

I am also convinced that this is a religious as well as a political issue. Most of these groups use the name "Christians" and, all of them claim to be Christian. Yet they attack the Protestant Churches, its clergy and its councils. They teach a perverted and distorted religion and call it Christianity. They cause and promote division and strife in congregations of church people; all in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord of the Church.

The Church has sat silently by for too long. We must meet this challenge head on in order that people may know the truth. I agree with Dr. Harold Bosley (Christ Methodist Church, New York) when speaking in Georgia recently called upon local churches everywhere to "disassociate themselves in no uncertain terms from extremist groups that 'rise up and try to intimidate' us." He added, "The Church ought to bring such efforts under the severest criticism, they are a threat to the country's freedom. With such intimidation movements the Church should 'slug it out, toe to toe, in the open'". (Christian Advocate, Feb. 15, 1962, p. 21)

The Protestant Church and its clergy have always recognized Communism as a threat to Democracy and as a demonic religion. It has also been one of the strongest bulwarks against Communism. But we can have no association with groups who under the disguise of being Christians and Anti-Communist lead us into Fascism under the pretense of saving us from Communism."

My purpose this morning is:

- 1.) To examine the charges of the "extreme far right" and the results of this position.
- 2.) To propose that this is a theological issue in that these movements have a religious rather than a political base.
- 3.) To answer the question "Why do people join these groups?"

I. THE FAR RIGHT GROUPS - An Examination

These groups are a threat to our democratic way of life. By their promotion of hatred, suspicion and mass hysteria they undermine the very foundations of a free society. They have no respect for the ways of democracy or due process of law, but prefer strong arm, authoritarian solutions. They call themselves patriots. But it takes more than cloaking yourself in the Flag and yelling "charge" to make you a patriot. The quiet and determined patriotism of men such as astronaut Col. John Glenn, Jr. is an eloquent contrast to the fanatical rumblings of a General Walker or Robert Welch. Those who talk loudest can run fastest when the showdown comes. Erich Hoffer in his book The True Believer says "the traitor is usually a fanatic-radical-or reactionary who goes over to the enemy in order to hasten the downfall of a world he loathes. Most of the traitors of the Second World War came from the extreme right."

President John F. Kennedy has said, "Let our patriotism be reflected in the creation of confidence rather than crusades of suspicion."

New York Republican Senator Jacob Javits puts my concern in a nutshell when he said "Principles of a free society can be eroded from the extreme right as well as the extreme left." (Time, April 21, 1961).

Let us examine some of the proposals and charges made by these groups. To outline them highlights this 'chamber of horrors.'

The John Birch Society says we should impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren since he and the Supreme Court are Communists. Former Presidents Eisenhower and Truman and President Kennedy are Communists. The late John Foster Dulles and the State Department are Communists. The United Nations is a Communist tool. Some of their followers such as a Chicago Roman Catholic priest who differs with the Pope on this matter wants to

"bomb Russia now." If these men were allowed to rule the United States would be another Algeria. Also that 7,000 Protestant ministers are either Communists or "Communist sympathizers." J. Edgar Hoover, director of the F.B.I. seems to disagree with them. In the February 7, 1962 issue of Christian Century he is quoted as saying "the Communists have been almost entirely unsuccessful in infiltrating the American churches? When Methodist Bishops, Gerald Kennedy and Richard C. Raines challenged Robert Welch to produce the name of even one Communist Methodist minister he was silent.

Those who saw the CBS television program "Thunder on the Right" (Feb. 26, 1962) or NBC, Chet Huntley's Report (February 16, 1962) saw tyranny asserting itself. You may remember that Billy Hargis warned his speakers not to attack racial or political or religious groups "since newsmen were present". He implied that if they were not present then it would be alright. And what happened? The first speaker up attempted to prove that Negroes were an inferior people. They have said that Negro leader Martin Luther King is a Communist sympathizer. Some groups have revealed Anti-Semitic teaching. You can readily see the Ku Klux Klan sympathizers reaching for their "sheets and crosses."

Now may we consider some of their Methods. They create mass hysteria by yelling "Communists everywhere." Anyone who happens to disagree with them is called a Communist. Franklin Littell of Southern Methodist Theological School has said:

"The cowardly assault of writers of anonymous letters, of faceless organizers of anonymous telephone campaigns is the mark of totalitarians - not the style of free men. The paranoid paperhanger or candymaker who justifies himself when caught in the lie with the argument that the general tendency of his attack is true, does not belong in the discussion with free men. Neither do the defrocked preacher and the hit-and-run evangelist with the phony doctor's degree who have made themselves small fortunes by lying about the leaders of the World Council of Churches, the United Nations, The National Council of Churches and the American Government." (Christianity and Crisis, March 19, 1962, p. 38.)

What can happen was seen in Los Angeles a few weeks ago when a minister who appeared on a panel denouncing the John Birch Society had his home bombed. The Birchites denied any responsibility for it. But when any group creates an atmosphere of hysteria that causes unbalanced persons to resort to violence they can't shun all responsibility by merely saying "we didn't do it."

The Christian Anti-Communist Crusade's leader, Fred Schwarz, M.D. is the pseudo-intellectual of the Far Right spokesman. In his book, You Can Trust the Communists (to do exactly as they say) I would say he did a good job of describing how the Communist work. However, the book's value is offset by many misleading insinuations. Some of them are listed below.

(The next 7 points were summarized when the sermon was preached.)

1. He insinuates that most all college students and liberal professors are either Communists or "Communist sympathizers."
2. Insinuates that all Protestant ministers are dupes of the Communists. (He never names one.) Thus throwing suspicion on all.
3. That all groups advocating disarmament are Communist (never names a group.)
4. Says Russia is taking over the United States because we keep making concessions (he never names a concession made.)
5. Says Communists have been 100% successful and that no group is effectively combating it. (How about his own group?) He thus creates lack of confidence

in our government. (Could Schwarz be aiding the Communists?)

6. Every tourist and government official who goes to Russia (Schwarz has never been) comes back an unconscious agent of the Communists. (Does this include Mr. Nixon?)
7. Uses ambiguous names and references. For example, he tells about a journalist friend who has written great anti-Communist books. (Never names the man or the book.) The book is loaded with insinuations not backed up by references, names, or concrete facts.
8. His Solutions. They seem to boil down to this: "join my group for a membership fee and buy my books."

On the basis of Schwarz own arguments I suspect he may be a Communist dupe and his Crusade could be a "front." He tears down confidence in our government, creates hysteria, and gives misleading facts and half-truths.

Schwarz is a good book salesman. The Attorney General of California who calls his crusade "patriotism for profit" and a "a fly by night promotion" revealed that in 90 days in Los Angeles Schwarz showed a net profit of \$214,757. (The Christian Century, February 28, 1962, p. 253). What happens to this money as well as vast sums taken in other cities has never been established said the Attorney General. His Crusade was denounced by Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike and Methodist Bishop Tippet and other clergy of the San Francisco bay area.

Where can this kind of thinking lead us? It would seem that the Far Rightists would lead us into the tyranny they claim to oppose. I want you to notice carefully these statements from William Shirer's book, The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich. After telling how the Far Right and the Junkers (Generals) of Nazi Germany had joined hands he says (page 195).

"Thus with one stroke Hitler was able not only to legally gag his opponents and arrest them at will but, by making a trumped up Communist threat 'official', as it were to throw millions of the middle class and peasantry into a frenzy of fear that unless they voted for National Socialism at the election.....the Bolsheviks might take over. They promised publication of 'documents proving the Communist conspiracy', but never did."

Does that sound like anything you have heard in 1962? What about modern Germany? John Gunther in Inside Europe Today (pg. 31) says "Nobody in Germany, except a few lunatics on the extreme Right, wants a war."

Could it happen here? Senator Joseph McCarthy gave us one warning and the "extremists" of the Right today are giving us another. They are sufficient evidence that it could happen here.

II. THE THEOLOGICAL ISSUE

I believe we are making a mistake to look for the basis of the Far Right groups in the political realm. Here we have groups who are fired by a religious fervor. I believe the true basis of the Far Right is religious rather than political. The political is only its means of expression. The journalist, James Reston has said "these evangelists for freedom are a cross between Aimee Semple McPherson and Joe McCarthy." (Christianity and Crisis, February 1962, p. 219).

I believe we see here the rise of a "Militant Fundamentalism." What do we mean by Fundamentalism? We don't mean conservative Christianity. A conservative may believe, as well as a liberal, in some doctrines held by fundamentalists, such as the virgin birth, etc. However, the fundamentalist is one who says "if you don't believe it (because he does) then you aren't a Christian." The Far Right fundamentalist goes another step and says "if you don't then you are a Communist."

Fundamentalism then is indicative of a "certain mentality" as well as a theological position. After the defeat of Fundamentalism in the debate with liberalism in the 1920's and 30's it has been waiting for a chance to renew its attack. Now in an atmosphere of doubt and fear of nuclear war it has come to the fore with a vengeance.

Schwarz, Hargis, and others all admit to carrying on a religious Crusade. They are bitter, suspicious and vindictive in their methods. Fred Schwarz is a fundamentalist Baptist lay preacher from Australia. Billy Hargis is a fundamentalist "fire and brimstone" evangelist from Tulsa. Much of the printing for the groups is done at Harding College in Searcy, Arkansas, a college of the fundamentalist "Church of Christ".

It was through the influence of Billy Hargis that the Air Force Training Manual issued in 1960 stated that the Communists had infiltrated most all Protestant churches and that most ministers were Communist sympathizers. The Defense Department has since corrected this lie - (see: Ralph Lord Roy, Communism and The Churches, Harcourt Brace, 1960, pg. 418 ff.).

A good example of this Fundamentalism in the Far Right is given in the writing of Edgar C. Bundy, chairman of the Church League of America with headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois. I would like to examine with you Chapter X of his book A Manual For Survival (a counter subversive Study Course). He says the following things:

1. "In every case involving a minister in Communist activity, within the United States, you will find that he is what we call a "Modernist", (Bundy's word for "liberals"), or radical in the field of theology " (122).
2. Bundy lists certain beliefs demanded by fundamentalists such as (virgin birth, blood atonement, bodily resurrection, coming of Jesus on clouds.) Since liberal theologians do not feel these doctrines are a necessity for Christian belief they are called Communist. Bundy says "the whole strategy was designed and planned in Moscow."
3. The National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches are Communist fronts. "Its leaders are the most blatant deniers of the Christian Faith," said Bundy.

The late John Foster Dulles was a member of both groups and a Communist.

John MacKay, former President of Princeton Theological School was a member and a Communist.

4. The Revised Standard Version Bible published by the National Council of Churches is Communist inspired. (You know, he may have a point, have you ever noticed how many R.S.V. Bibles have Red bindings?)

(Points 5 - 8 were omitted when preached)

5. Union Theological Seminary in New York, home of Reinhold Niebuhr and John C. Bennett is a Communist School.

6. The Christian Century, a liberal religious journal is a Communist supporting publication.
7. Nels Ferre, one of the great American theologians and a dedicated Christian gentleman is called a Communist. Bundy attacks two of his books The Christian Understanding of God and the Sun and the Umbrella. He takes passages out of context and willfully (or perhaps a person such as Bundy really can't understand) misinterprets them. He then has the audacity to say "What follows is Marxism pure and simple."
8. The Social Gospel is wrecking the churches, homes, and nation. He says the Gospel is for "individual souls" not social problems. Yet, if he isn't involved in social issues who is? What he means is that if you differ with his social views then you are a Communist.

One of Bundy's favorites is Carl McIntire head of the "American and International" Councils of Churches, and editor of Christian Beacon. These are small fundamentalist splinter groups. Carl McIntire was booted out of the Presbyterian Church in 1936. He has been spreading his Gospel of hate and vengeance ever since. You name it, unless McIntire proposed it, he is against it. Note this: It was Carl McIntire who persuaded Australian Fred Schwarz, head of the "Christian Anti-Communist Crusade" and author of You Can Trust the Communists (to do exactly as they say), to come to America with his Crusade. (Time, Feb. 9, 1962, pg. 18).

What solutions does Bundy offer? One is to be well informed, which means reading about 10 books, which he has selected for you. If you can't do this then "make liberal and frequent contributions and let others more qualified fight for you." Always we have the pitch for money and promotion of the demagogue.

Bundy says that those who oppose the Anti-Communist Crusade are Communists. Well, I not only am opposed to them but I charge Bundy and his colleagues with promoting Fascism and being "tools of the Communists." They are aiding the Communist in the destruction of the Churches in America. Wouldn't they be perfect "fronts"?

Once again I call your attention to William Shirer's book The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich (pp. 235-39).

"With the division of the German Protestants the fanatical Nazis organized in 1932 - The German Christians Faith Movement. Opposed to them was the Confessional Church (this was the Church of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemoller.) In between were the Protestants who took no stand."

He says further:

"On the eve of the election of delegates to the Synod, which would elect the Reich Bishop, Hitler personally took to the radio to 'urge' the election of "German Christians." One Nazi leader said, "The German people are now called by the party and especially by the Fuehrer to a real Christianity."

Could it ever happen here? Bishop Charles W. Brashares nailed it down when he recently said:

"We in America will have to decide whether these attackers of our Presidents, our Supreme Court, democracy and freedom can lead us to follow a new American Hitler who promises to save us from Communism.....if we Christians believe in something better than suspicion, hate, lies, the time to stand up and say

so is now." (The Rock River Methodist, February, 1962).

Not all who use the title "Christian either in Germany or America are followers of the "Prince of Peace." "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).

III. THE CAUSES "Why Do People Join the Far Right Groups?"

I wish to take a clue from an article by the conservative author and philosopher Russell Kirk which appeared recently in the "Post Christian Man" series of Perspective magazine. Mr. Kirk stated that contemporary man has no fear of God and therefore, he fears everybody and everything else. He forgets that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." I agree with the other man named 'Kirk'.

What kind of people join the Far Right? There are many well meaning people who have been misled by these groups and who wish they had never heard of them. However, mostly they are people without a cause, whose lives are spiritually nude, people without a God. This super patriotism gives them someone to love and someone to hate and an authoritarian leader to follow.

Having no God, they become scared and suspicious of other people. Do you remember the Bomb Shelter hysteria of a few months ago? What happened to it? Has fear of Communists displaced fear of radioactive fallout? Fear of fallout was a legitimate fear. Whether or not home shelters were protection is debatable. I noticed, however that there was a certain type of person who looked upon shelters as protection from neighbors rather than fallout. Their problem was "when do I shoot my neighbor before or after." This same type of person is now looking "under the bed" and over the "back-yard fence" for Communists.

These people become hysterical and gullible. A few days ago a woman was telling us that the Communists were taking over the country. She had read a book that said so. "You should read it, it has the facts" she said. When questioned she could not recall the title or author and admitted she read only part of it. Former General Walker comes to Chicago and makes wild charges and people believe they are Facts. Are they facts? Or does General Walker say they are facts?

Many of the Far Right today are yesterdays's Far Left. It is said that former Nazis now make the best police in East Germany. Many of the charges made against the Churches come from former Communists.

Part of the blame for this "spiritual vacuum" must be accepted by the Church. Seeing Christian people joining extremist groups makes us ask "What have we been preaching about the past several years?"

From the pulpit of America we have heard "do good and be good" and then "God will see that you get your split level house and the office promotion." That won't do. In this week's Time, (March 16, 1962), there is an article on modern preaching in which Dr. Carl Howie says "peace of mind is deadlier than a doornail."

For too long now the Church has faced a secularized and hostile world and tried to make peace with it by "muttering irrelevancies and trivialities." I remember a friend of mine once jokingly said, when asked about a hymn, "just pick out something religious." In the movie, Elmer Gantry, a friend describes one of Elmer's sermons as being "real friendly." Something "religious and real friendly" won't do the job.

This is a task for the laity as well as the clergy. People aren't coming to church anymore for our "sewing circles and bowling teams." Today's youth are demanding that the church meet the "deep things" of life.

There are encouraging signs however. One is the growing number of small groups meeting together to study the content of our faith and to seek a more determined discipleship. The Yokefellow group in our Church is such a group. Another hopeful sign is the revival of theological depth in our theological schools. Still another is the growing strength of the Ecumenical Movement which is causing more cooperation and even union among the Churches.

CONCLUSION

I hope we have been able to show - 1.) why we believe that the Far Right extremists are a great danger, and that 2.) we have properly analyzed their nature and 3.) thrown some light on why people join these groups.

Now we may ask "What can we do?" Well, we can't sell you a membership card or peddle a book, but we can do the following:

1. Let us face the fact that one of the great challenges to democracy and the Church is Communism. Let us oppose it intelligently and effectively. Soap box orators with a "collection plate" are hardly dependable. J. Edgar Hoover said recently "there are far too many self-styled experts on Communism." Let our schools and churches aid in the education of our people concerning Communism.
2. The Church must take a stand against all extremist groups, left or right. "If we do not" soon we will find "that we cannot." When you hear the Church or the National and World Council of Churches unjustly attacked, or the clergy slandered, speak up. The same holds true for our Presidents, and other reliable leaders whom we have elected.
3. Let us proclaim to the lost and "lonely crowd" of modern man, caught in a spiritual vacuum, the Good News of the Gospel of Christ - the Prince of Peace.

And having heard this Good News "go forth to build, amidst the rumble of tyranny and fear, a world in which men may live together in peace." Knowing all the while that we rely not on our own strength alone but upon the God whose will has been made known in Jesus of Nazareth. For it is His Kingdom, and "the gates of Hell shall not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). Amen.