

Communism's Challenge to the Church in 1962

By Paris Reidhead*

Our Theme this morning is, Communism's Challenge to the Church in 1962. The Scripture to which I relate this theme is that which we read, 2 Timothy, Chapter 3, verse 1. The first verse of this portion is certainly applicable to our day and our times.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."

But it has ever been thus ever since Adam and Eve sinned and an angel stood with drawn sword in the gate of the Garden. Man has lived in peril. Abel was in peril of the wrath and anger of his brother, Cain. Noah's generation was in peril of the wrath of God poured out upon the wicked imaginations of that generation of which it was said, "It repented God that He had made men" (Gen. 6:6). There has never been a time in human history when the product of man's sin has not resulted in peril.

I think, however, that the combination of technological advance and philosophical evil has produced in this year of 1962 a situation that is perhaps more volatile and explosive than that which has characterized any other period in the past. I do not intend this morning to use this hour in God's house as a whip to frighten you concerning these dangers with which you are perhaps already too familiar. Your newspapers carried the incessant testimony that there is no way that we can stop inter-continental ballistic missiles from reaching their targets if enough missiles are sent and planes carrying bombs leave from a destination. We recognize the peculiar vulnerability of New York City as probably one prime targets of any enemy mad enough to nuclear war. We realize further that we are living in days when materialism sensualism has gripped our Nation, when we have earned the opprobrium of thinking, decent people in this land and in others for our ceaseless export of pornography and filth through literature and film and music, that lands which own not our Lord Jesus and pretend not to the name Christian place embargoes upon all of our cultural exports because of the deteriorating effect they fear it will have upon their young people. So a country that has upon its coins, In God we trust, and has in its pledge of allegiance One Nation under God, has, by its ceaseless lack of regard for principles that made it great, earned the reproach and the indignation of people around the world.

We also recognize that there has been, through the incessant proclamation of atheism through schools and other means of communication, a deterioration of national character which is the ultimate threat to this land. I believe the history of such a modern nation as France will prove to us that no land can rest securely behind its guns. It was France that impoverished itself after the first great world war to build the Maginot Line which was to have been a deterrent against any future Germanic aggression. Unfortunately, while the tax payers were building the tremendous emplacements and pointing the muzzles of their canons out toward the land of Germany, there was at the same time this colossal deterioration of character, so that when war actually broke out, the enemy came in through the north, and the guns of the Maginot Line were aimed in the wrong direction. It seems, therefore, to me this morning peculiarly the responsibility of church to sound again this testimony that history has always been determined by the minority.

The minority might have been a group of five in the cities Sodom and Gomorrah had they been there that loved God, and had that been the case God would have withheld His wrath and His anger, and spared these wicked cities. I believe that when you hear the prophet say that God wondered that there was no intercessor, and looked to find a man to stand in the gap and fill up the hedge, you will realize that history has always been determined by the minority. We are told that there are some 90 million persons in America that are affiliated with religious organizations, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, but the National Association of Evangelicals, I think, correctly ascertains that there are some 5 to 7 million committed, intelligent, vocal evangelicals in the land of America. Relating this to a population of almost 190 million, you see the small minority that such committed Christians actually are and represent. May I remind you today that the history of the nations that were parallel to Israel was determined by the obedience of Israel. God raised up the Assyrians and allowed the kings to become great, in order that they might be His threshing instruments, to discipline His disobedient people. God raised up Nebuchadnezzar for the similar purpose. And you will recall that when Nebuchadnezzar was storming the gates of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah was instructed of God to say that the land would fall, it would fall, that those who spoke otherwise were not taught of God. And

God at the time went so far as to say, Nebuchadnezzar, My servant, the servant of chastisement, the servant of discipline, the servant of judgment that was reaping upon a people that had the testimony of truth, the just consequences and reward for their dereliction, their unbelief, and their disobedience.

At this present moment, I believe that an intelligent Christian finds it extremely difficult to pray that God will spare America from judgment. America has been pleased to abandon its heritage in such large measure degree that it has almost ripened itself for judgment. Take any criteria you wish, whether it be the rising rate of divorce, of alcoholism, of major crime, of juvenile delinquency, and you will discover the continuous erosion of principles, and the continuous ripening for destruction. I recognize that saying this that we are primarily inditing that small group, the church. Had the church of Jesus Christ, even as small a minority it is, been all that God intended it to be, this land would be in a different state than it is today.

May I, therefore, postulate this principle, that the condition of any land is determined by that small minority of people that have committed themselves to the truth of God and the Word of God. Now today we are in great peril. Ninety miles from the coast of Florida is a communist state. Fourteen years ago, we are told, there was a banquet in Washington, D. C., at which time our Governor, Nelson Rockefeller, is said to have been seated next to Mrs. Gromyko. In the course of the conversation regarding the plans for communist conquest, the statement was made by her that by 1960 Cuba would be would be a communist state. He said to her, or is reported to have said, This is an utter impossibility. The Monroe Doctrine will be sufficient to protect this hemisphere from the establishing of a socialist state. Well, you understand that she was wrong, that it did not happen as she said it would happen that Cuba became communist in 1960. It was 1961. And just one month afterward until the coup was effected. Now we understand further that before he died Lenin predicted the procedure of conquest, declaring that the program would be that of going into the countries surrounding the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and securing governments sympathetic with them to act as buffers against the west, then into China, from China into the Islands of Asia, into Africa ultimately into South America, until finally the United States the last bastion of capitalism would be encircled by Communist Countries, and the statement was made, By 1973 America will fall into our hands like overripe fruit from the tree. There is a certain degree of corroboration of this thinking that came from a certain visitor, Mr. Khrushchev, who out in the State of Iowa was asked by a naive citizen there in one of the farms he was visiting this question, "Mr. Khrushchev, are you Russians planning to bomb America?" And he is reported to have stated with a smile, "Why of course not. Who ever heard of shooting a horse two weeks before it is given to you."

In the light of this, I submit to you that it behooves us to recognize that it may have been no idle threat that made when he said, Your Grandchildren will live under communism, and your children may. But I come back to this; again the responsibility must rest somewhere. Oh, we can blame it on statesmen. We can blame it on educational leaders. But there is only one group in this land, or in any land that claims to have direct contact with Almighty God. Obviously the philosophy of communism is atheistic. There is no doubt or question about this. There has been an established fact beyond challenge. We recognize that being atheistic it is of satanic origin, and I would submit to you this morning that it is a religion of darkness, the god of which is the god of this world, and whose genius and power is being utilized in pursuing of its aims.

I would further say to you then that it is incumbent upon the church of Jesus Christ to recognize that her responsibility is to be something, not just to say something. And if a company of 5 million people in a land as large as this are what the Bible describes as Christian, there is no reason to suppose that their influence would be inconsequential. For what people are there other than these who say that God's intention in grace was to live in all who know and trust Him. What other people would dare to proclaim that God would tabernacle among men, and they could be fill with the power and presence, yea, and the Person of the Man who conquer the grave and reigns with all authority in heaven and earth in His hands.

Years ago in the city of Minneapolis, I had an unusual experience. Undoubtedly there are many of you that have heard me relate this, but as Oliver Wendell Holmes said in The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, "Ideas are the tools of the speaker, and who ever heard of a carpenter abandoning his plane after he has smoothed a board with it." And so this, I submit to you, as being as patently clear and true as when you may have heard it the first time, and make no further apology for it.

As a student in Northwestern Schools, housed in the First Baptist Church, we were assigned the task of writing a theme, The subject was to be relevant to the day and the hour. I chose to write on, Communist Education Training Methods in the state of Minnesota. With the help of teachers, Dr. Riley himself prepared some twenty two questions, as I recall, armed with these I went directly across the street, for with characteristic temerity the communist party in the State of Minnesota had rented an empty new car sales room directly opposite the front doors of that great citadel of fundamentalism in Minnesota, the First Baptist Church. I went in, presented my theme, it was not challenge I said that I had some question that I wanted to ask. The girl at the desk said, I'll call Big Bill. He is a God-hater, and he can probably answer your questions better than anyone else. He was big, and I was timid and intimidated, frightened by this man and the situation. I asked the questions, received clear, honest, uncompromising, or I felt uncompromising answers, and made my notes and prepared to leave. Viewing the large bulging briefcase on the floor by the information desk, Bill said, Is that yours? I said, Yes. He said, Is there a Bible in it? I said, Yes. He said, Do you read it? I said, I'm a Bible School Student across the street. He said, Still do you read it? I said, Yes. He said, Do you believe it? I said, Yes. He said, Then why have you wasted my time? You didn't need to come and ask me these questions. If you have a Bible, and you read it, and you believe it. I said, What do you mean? He said, When we found out years ago that a little people that had neither political influence nor educational authority, nor money, were able in two generations to conquer the world with their idea, and that they had left a complete record as to the means they had used in doing it, we studied that record to find out their methods. And then he went on to say, Every educational method, and every policy of operation that we are teaching here we can trace directly back to something in that book. He said, I went over across the street to hear this famed fellow speak. He said, I was tremendously impressed. There were nearly two thousand people there that day. And I began to realize that if those two thousand people did what he said there was not much hope for us. But that day though he gave a clue. He said, Everybody here this morning is expected to return tonight. I said, That's a test. We'll see whether or not there is anything to fear from these folk by whether or not they come. And I went back that night, he said. There were about six hundred people. Fourteen hundred of them didn't come. Then I heard him say, Now everyone here is to come on Wednesday night at 7:30. This is the hour of power when we will lay hold of God. That impressed me. If they really could get hold of God, 600 people could change the city of Minneapolis, and the State of Minnesota. We had better find out about them. And so I went on Wednesday night, and there were about 150. He said, I want to tell you one thing. The church as it is over there, and as I have come to learn about it since, doesn't offer any deterrent or interference or obstacle in the path of our purpose. He went on to say, You see difference is this. You (and he pointed cross the street) have rejected practicality of the Bible, and hold to the theology. We reject the theology as being superstition, but hold to the practicality. And by taking what you have rejected, we are going to wipe you off the face of the earth. That was 1936. And their progress been according to schedule, and unless there is a release of the power of God through a vehicle and a people that are prepared to obey Him, I see absolutely nothing on the horizon today capable of deterring the schedule of conquest. There is one little glimmer on the horizon which is even then a greater inditement of the church of Jesus Christ by its presence.

Some of you may have received information during the month past of the group called Moral Rearmament. You may have had some contact with it. You realize that a few months ago the founder of the movement, a former Presbyterian preacher from Pennsylvania, Frank Buchmann, died. He started first the Oxford Group Movement, then later made it Moral Rearmament in order that people from every religious background could participate in it, with no Christian overtones. However, there are four basic absolutes, they are called, or principles, you would see them, that are the foundation upon which this Movement lasts, this ideology lasts. It is this order. First, the absolute commitment to unselfishness, absolute commitment to love, an absolute commitment to truth, and an absolute commitment to purity. Now, the effect can be measured in one place. Konrad Adenauer, the Chancellor of West Germany, is prepared to state that when Moral Rearmament went into the Ruhr Valley, 70 to 80 per cent of the union were also card carrying communists, or members of the communist party by conviction or affiliation. After some eight to ten years of ministry and operation of moral rearmament, the figures were changed until it was less than eight, just something more than seven percentage of the union that were members of the communist party, and the whole attitude of western Germany and of the Ruhr region changed. This has taken place in other areas and other parts. I do not know the authenticity of this, but I do know this, that the statement has been made that the Kremlin fears moral rearmament as an ideology which, if it ever gains popularity, will succeed in deterring their timetable of conquest. But it has absolutely no fear of nor respect for the church.

What actually these four absolutes represent? **Absolute truth, absolute purity, absolute love, and absolute unselfishness.** Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Except you repent you will perish" (Luk. 13:3, 5). Repentance is a change of mind, a change of will, a change of intention, and consequently a change of action and practice, a change from something to something. From what? From selfishness, from hatred, from impurity, from untruthfulness, from sin. Our Lord says, "Except you repent you will perish." And the opposite of selfishness is unselfishness. The opposite hatred is love. And the opposite of the lie is truth. And the opposite of impurity is purity. And so it is right about face. Thus the whole foundation of Moral Rearmament is the codification of repentance, and all of the force that it has released into society is nothing more than the force of human energy, human personality channeled through repentance, and yet it has this terrific force so that it can be feared as that which could deter conquest.

Extend it just a little further. Five to seven million Christians of evangelical conviction in America, all of whom must have repented. Today even that small minority does not deserve to be called Christian. Must have changed from the purpose to please self to please God. Must have changed from the policy of selfishness to unselfishness, hatred to love, from untruth and lying to truth, from impurity to purity. All of the seven million ought to have made this the foundational threshold of their Christian experience. Where, I say, where is the dynamic released by these, with human enthusiasm, intelligence and energy? Could it be that even this 5 to 7 million have not repented, but have given merely intellectual assent to a scheme of theology that has made no moral grip upon their life. If so, then we are in far greater danger than we may have thought by any superficial view statistics. But allow for the moment that five to the seven million do exist that have repented, and have the presence of the risen Christ, and God the Holy Ghost, do you not feel that there ought to be a release of power infinitely greater than such a movement as Moral Rearmament could represent. God, by His resurrected Son, filling lives of those who have purposed only to please Him, so we will have to say, Our danger may begin with the fact that the five to seven million committed evangelicals are less than Christian. Then we will have to say that whenever we have winnowed them down to those that are Christian that they have been weakened by their failure to allow Christ to have His rightful way and place in their lives, and live through them His own untrammelled, unhindered life, and then we will have to say that they are further weakened by their failure to accept the basic principles of operation and policy.

Come with me back to Minneapolis and to Big Bill. I said, Tell me, What do you mean by this? that you have accepted the practicality and rejected the theology. What do you mean practicality? He said, Here. Doesn't your Bible say, Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus? I said, Yes. And doesn't your Bible say, That whether you eat or drink, you are to do it for the glory of God? I said, Yes. He said, Now you people do not do that. But, he said, we do. Whatever we do, word or deed, or drink, all is in complete agreement with the purpose of our being which is to promote ends and aims of communism. We live a total life. He said, Doesn't your Bible say, Obey them that have the rule over you? that He has put some in the church as evangelists, pastors and teachers, the younger to serve the elder, and that they are to obey. I said, Yes. You don't do that. That man over there, their preacher, they pay him to tell them what God says. And God told him to tell them to come back Sunday night, and with complete disregard stayed home. God told him to tell them to come and pray, and with complete indifference they stayed home. But, he said, it is not so with us. Every communist obeys as the man that is over him, And, he said, because you have become anarchist, every man doing what is right in his own eyes, and are not prepared to accept the practicality of the Scripture, we are going to take that which you have rejected and spurned, and wipe you off the face of the earth.

Let us bring it into relationship, into contrast. Back in the Book of Acts, a small group of people, 120, 500, that understood repentance, filled with the fullness of God, and obedient to the principles that were established, changed the world. Gibbons in his monumental volume, the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, has a chapter on the impact of Christianity on decaying Rome. I am not taking these words from him. I have derived these statements from him. A lady came to me after I spoke up in White Plains, and said, Does Moody Colportage put out the Decline and Fall of Roman Empire in a colportage size? I would like to get it. No, Moody Colportage does not. You will find it in the library, if you wish to, and it would be profitable to read it.

But five principles derived from Gibbons. He said, You will never understand the impact of the church upon Rome until you realize that every Christian believed in the resurrection of Christ. Now, startling, is it? Oh, no. You see the difference is that in the centuries since then there has been such an erosion of the word, "believe." In the 20th century the word believe means to

agree with the fact. In the first century it meant commit oneself unreservedly to the Person. And when Paul said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he did not simply say, Holy this to be historically true, but it meant a total, complete, abandonment to the sovereignty of Christ, in every area of the life. And so, said Gibbon, you will observe these people, and every one of them had all give all they had and were to an invisible Lord that had conquered the grave. They believed in the resurrection of Christ, and this belief meant a total abandonment to His sovereignty and His Lordship. Just as Paul, seeing Christ was alive, said, Lord, "What wilt Thou have me to do" (Act. 9:6).

Secondly, Gibbons said, You'll not understand the impact of the church on those first generation apart from the *fact of the startling purity of the people that called themselves Christians*; those that had been vicious and vile were simple and clear. Those that had been selfish and arrogant were childlike and humble. Those that had been cruel and greedy now had the same attitude as the Lord they professed to know and love. And there on the swamp and the morass of the decaying culture of Rome came these spotless lilies of personalities, some having been drunkards and reprobates of every kind; but having met Jesus Christ, their lives reflected His own spotless purity.

Thirdly, he said, you will never understand the impact of the church upon that first generations apart from the fact *that wherever Christians gathered together, there was Jesus Christ manifest in their midst, and the same works that He had done were done in His name*. The blind received their sight, the lame were healed, the demon possessed were freed, the wicked were changed, their character was altered in the Name of Jesus Christ, so that wherever they gathered the proof of His presence were the greater works He had said would be done.

The fourth thing that characterized that early church *was the fact that no man seemed ambitious for place, or position, but all were moving under the control of an invisible head*. It was an army without officers, commissioned or non-commissioned, there were those who served. Those who led were the servants. He said, They moved as though they were an army controlled by invisible commanders. Then, he said, You will never understand the tremendous impact of the church apart from the fact *that the people that called themselves Christian cared more about heaven than they did about earth*. There was not any way you could bribe them. There was not any way you could buy them. There was not any threat you could hold over them that made them fear. There was nothing of which you could deprive them that made them care. The rich counted that their riches were something just to be held until they could be given at the will of Christ. The poor counted that their poverty was just the privilege of trusting the Lord to supply their needs. The slaves counted that their chains were but the means of binding them to the place of witness. And the owner counted that his freedom and the owning of his slaves was but that he had some there to whom he could reveal Christ. The ones who lived counted it all joy to die and when there was a call stated by the emperor, stating that a hundred fifty would die, five thousand would gather outside government office, the young saying, Let us die that the wise or old may serve, and the old saying, Let us die that the young may live. And there was no way to stop the people, for everyone who believed in the resurrection of Christ manifest the purity of Christ, the power of Christ, submission to the sovereignty of Christ, and earth had no hold, and only heaven held their hearts.

My dear, unless we can come back again to pristine early Biblical Christianity, then I think you had better prepare to let the future be marked by the Kremlin, for the only hope that I see lies with a people that are prepared to be Christian in the 20th Century as they were in the 1st.

What is the challenge of Communism to the Church in 1962? It is a challenge to you. The whole responsibility rests on you. You cannot say, Washington. You cannot say, Congress. You cannot say, Cabinet or President. It rests on you. God is looking for a man or woman to stand in the gap, and fill up the hedge. Oh, there are others who pursue it from a political point of view. There are those who will pursue it from a patriotic point of view. But I submit to you that as a member of the church of Christ, your responsibility as a Christian in the church is to be Christian in Biblical terms and definition, accept not only the theology, but the practicality of the Bible. For when the politician has done all that he can do, the patriot has done all that he can do, it comes back to the child of Jesus Christ to determine whether or not God will stretch forth His hand in mercy and turn back wrath. For God is looking for a man to stand in the gap and fill up the hedge. The only way you can fulfill your responsibility is to say, God, by the grace You have given, and by the power your Son, and the presence of Your Holy Spirit, and obedience of Your Word, I will be that man. Shall we pray.

I want your minds to go back quickly with me. I want you to go back to the fact that the Soviet Government in 1937 published its own figures, and said that eight million had died because of religious crimes, or because they were Christian. I want you to go back to Korea, North Korea where 400 thousand died in twelve years because they were Christian. I want you to go to China where, out of the 20 million that have been officially by the state deprived of existence, 10 million of them are estimated to have died for the crime of being Christian. I want your heart to be raised in thanksgiving to God that you have lived in a land where you have had freedom to worship, but in the light tremendous sacrifice of your fellows who poured out their life in faithfulness to their Lord, in the light of the fact that God's Word says, "Obey them that have the rule over you," you are living in the land of freedom; do you not feel its responsibility? to be Christian in every Biblical sense, both as a member of the community of the church and as a citizen, carrying these principles into business, into schools, yes, into politics, into government function, for we have a king in the form of a constitution, and that king says participate, and pray (Heb. 13:17). And so this morning, remembering all those that have been deprived of life, in the will of God I will admit, paying for their faith with their life, remembering that just a few lands remain that are free to evangelize, send out the Gospel, and ours is one of them, bearing in mind what we have said, do you not believe that 1962 ought to be the year when, if you have been playing at being a Christian, you give it up. If you have been a halfhearted Christian you cease. If you have been less than Christ demands and promises, that you recognize it. Do you not feel that such an hour as this, an hour that tries men's souls ought not to call you to be everything that Jesus Christ has purposed and made possible by His shed blood, that the glory of the New Covenant may be seen. Do you not feel that in this day the Lord Jesus deserves to have a people that will reveal His glory?

Father of Jesus Christ, and our Father through faith in Jesus Christ, we come before Thee. The things we have said, and said in Thy presence as well as in the presence of this people. Something is going to happen this morning. Either we have heard so much that we will go away saying, Sermon, when it has not been sermon. It has been a life, a heart laid bare, ruptured, torn, shredded in the presence of this people, to try to be the instrument in Thy hands, Lord, of prying us out of indifference, of callousness, and second rate, halfhearted, lackadaisical Christian life. If it just were us, but it is more than us, more than ourselves. It is Thy purpose, Thy grace, Thy glory. O Father, we thank Thee for those here that feel the pressure of the hour and the day, and are seeking thee with their whole hearts. We thank Thee for those, Lord, that are beginning to realize the tremendous and responsibility of living as a Christian in the midst of the 20th century. We thank Thee for those, Lord, who in the night season are crying out to Thee to get a church here in the heart of this city that is everything Thou dost want it to be. We pray Thee, Father, that somehow by the working of Thy Holy Spirit Thou wilt revive us, revive this church. This is the 75th year of our history. O God, it either means that it is a threshold into oblivion, or it is a threshold into revival. Grant to us, Lord, as a people here at this Headquarters, at the beginning of this year of anniversary, an absolute abandonment of ourselves to the truth we hold so dear and profess, and to the Word that we believe, and to the Lord who loved us, and whom we love. And do here that which we have longed for, that Christianity in its pristine beauty, its early simplicity, and its wonderful power, here where sin reigns, grace may reign and the church may come forth with all that hast wanted it to be. Thou knowest hindrances. Thou knowest difficulties. O God, there is so much at stake. All we can say is, In Thy wisdom sovereignty, remove every hindrance that stands in the way of getting to Thyself what Thou dost want here. And so to that end, seal our thinking in this hour. Deal with us individually, our own hearts. Show us, Lord, that it is more than a group acting as a group. It is acting as individuals until the life of the Lord Jesus shared by the individuals can be manifest freely in the group. And so to that end meet us now as we bend low before Thee. In Jesus Name. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, January 7, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.