

When Scientists Became Sermonizers

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TEXT: II PETER 3:11

There was a time when men of science looked askance at the words which we have just read from II Peter. But with the explosion of the first atom bomb they came forth from their laboratories, and, using this scripture for a text, became our most earnest and eloquent preachers calling for a moral and spiritual regeneration.

Recently I received a letter from the wife of a missionary telling of a grave crisis through which she and her husband were passing. Said she, "I feel as though I am walking a tightrope, when one false step can mean disaster." This might well be the statement of every living person today. For truly the world is walking a tightrope, when one false step can mean disaster. Someone said years ago that if man ever learned to split the atom, the first thing he would do would be to make a bomb. And that is just what he did. H. G. Wells is said to have described our generation as a jet plane piloted by an ape. Alas, his words are all too true.

Have you ever thought what it would take to plunge the world into a nuclear war? Just a miscalculation on the part of diplomats. Or the rash act of some fanatical dictator. Or some trigger-happy pilot. Even a shortage in an electric wire controlling the alarm mechanism of a peace-loving nation. Truly we are walking

a tightrope when one false step can mean disaster. It is no wonder that our greatest scientists have become our most eloquent sermonizers.

Peter might well have been thinking of such a day as ours when he asked, "*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be . . . ?*" (II Peter 3:11)

As we consider this question let us note first, the condition; second, the challenge; third, the commitment.

THE CONDITION

In the last sixty years the world has seen a development without parallel in the annals of history. Starting with Lenin and seventeen followers the Communist movement grew until with less than forty thousand Communists it took over Russia. Until the end of World War II it was fairly well contained in that one nation. But since 1945 it has spread by intrigue and invasion until today more people live under Communism than have heard the gospel of Christ in the past two thousand years. With an intelligence which seems to be more than human it baffles the best diplomatic minds of the free world. Its military and scientific achievements have been astounding. Through fanatic zeal its agents have invaded almost every area of our life, where with printed and spoken propaganda it deceives and enslaves those who

have every reason to oppose it.

Communism promises but does not deliver. It speaks of peace and engenders war. It offers freedom only to enslave. With a confidence which defies explanation its leading spokesman says: "We will bury you," "History is on our side;" "Your grandchildren will live under Communism." And to back up these boasts he holds as blackmail over our heads the most powerful bomb ever exploded.

A mechanical brain was recently fed the comparative statistics of military strength to determine if and when Russia would surpass the United States in military power. The answer was 1965. A leading military authority testifying before a United States government committee was asked what he would suggest that we do. He replied that had they asked him that question fifteen years ago the answer would have been easy. Five years ago it would have been difficult. "But now," said he, "I do not know."

Such is the condition under which the world lives at this very hour.

THE CHALLENGE

That this condition challenges free men to the utmost needs no proving. But it is a challenge which so-far has gone largely unheeded by those best qualified to meet it.

In 1945 standing on the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, having just signed the articles of surrender with Japan, General Douglas MacArthur spoke to the world by radio. Said he, "I call on you to send thousands, even boatloads of missionaries to Japan. For if we are to save the spirit it must be of the flesh." Instead of thousands we sent hundreds.

I was in Tokyo the day that the announcement was made that the Japanese Diet would begin debating the question of renewing the defense pact with the United States. That

day a small group of students at Tokyo University demonstrated against this renewal. That evening Mrs. Hobbs and I ate dinner with the Colonel in charge of all our logistics for our armed forces in the Far East. I asked him if the demonstration was Communist inspired. "Of course it was," said he. "And remember that any day the United States withdraws from Japan militarily, diplomatically, economically, and spiritually, Russia will be glad to come in the next day."

Later the president of the Southern Baptist Convention and two missionaries spent forty-five minutes with the United States Ambassador to Japan. He told them that Japan is a spiritual vacuum. Two religions, Communism and Christianity, are endeavoring to fill it. One or the other will succeed. Whoever takes Japan will take Southeast Asia, and whoever does that will take Asia, Africa, yes, perhaps the world. The ambassador pled for a great spiritual revival of Christianity in Japan.

Yes, Japan is a vacuum waiting to be filled. A typical case is a young man who participated in the Tokyo riots in June of 1960. When asked by a newspaper man if he were a Communist, he replied, "No, I am nothing. You Americans took away my god, and gave me nothing to take his place."

No Safe Moment

Now in the light of such a challenge what are we doing? We are frantically preparing militarily in an effort to stem the tide of onrushing Communism. And well we might. For the military might of the free world is the only major restraining force to the designs of world Communism. But military might alone is not enough. It may restrain Communism, but it will not destroy it. You cannot destroy an idea with bombs and bullets. You may kill Communists

thereby, but not Communism itself. If the last fifty years of history have taught us anything, it has taught us that.

In 1914-1918 it was the Kultur of the Kaiser. In 1939-1945 it was Fascism and Nazism. In the early 1950's it was Communism. But it was the same idea under a different name. For we fight not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, the forces of evil which oppose God in the universe. The only thing that can destroy an idea is a better idea. And we have that better idea in the gospel of Christ. But it can come to grips with Communism only as it is preached, believed, and applied in and through the lives of those who espouse it.

History reveals that the free world has won the wars but has lost the peace. In 1914-1918 we fought and won a war to make the world safe for democracy. Democracy has not known a safe moment since November 11, 1918. In 1939-1945 we fought and won a war to preserve the four freedoms. Since 1945 more people have gone into slavery than during any other like period in history. In the 1950's we fought a stalemate to stop the spread of Communism. It has continued to spread until today one of its tentacles has encircled an island just ninety miles from our shores.

Until the Christian forces of the world take seriously their role in the struggle, and spend themselves without measure in it, the picture will not be changed.

THE COMMITMENT

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be . . . ?"

First, we must be a people of faith and not of fear. In another national crisis Franklin Delano Roosevelt said,

"We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

We must have faith in God. God is not dead. He has not been dethroned. Long ago David wrote, *"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast their cords away from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure"* (Ps. 2:1-5).

The people of God have had their backs to the wall before. But when they turned to God in repentance and consecration to His will, God has raised His mighty arm in victory. But always God waits on His people. He will not fail. But a given generation may fail Him. The choice is ours, not His.

We must have faith to believe that the gospel of Christ can destroy the designs of evil. This is true not only in the individual but in nations as well. It is the power of God unto salvation, not only in one soul but in problems vexing a nation.

A current example of this may be seen in Africa. We have so focused our attention on the strife-torn Congo that we have forgotten the many African nations which have come quietly and peacefully into national independence. For instance, when Nigeria celebrated her independence the Nigerian government had as invited guests two retired missionaries as a tribute to the contribution of missions in bringing the Nigerian people to this orderly, happy hour.

Later an American magazine reporter, a Mohammedan African, and a Christian official of the Nigerian government were talking about the

difference between current events in Nigeria and in the Congo. The magazine writer spoke cynically of missionaries. To which the Nigerian official replied that he attributed to the Christian missionaries much of the credit for his country's orderly emergence from colonial to independent status. The Moslem commented, "Then we should pray for a wave of missionaries for Africa." Yes, the gospel does work when given a chance.

Second, we must get off the defensive and go on the offensive. I am not speaking militarily but spiritually. History records that times of great social and political upheaval marked some of the most significant advances in Christian endeavor.

Last summer I stood in the Place de l'Concorde in Paris where the guillotine was located during the French Revolution. It is said that women sat and knitted as they watched people beheaded, counting the stitches by the heads rolling into the basket. It was a dark and foreboding time. A few days later I stood in the building in Kettering, England, where during that very time the modern foreign mission movement had its birth. One of Europe's darkest nights marked the dawn of one of the world's brightest eras in spreading the gospel.

The world desperately needs another such event today. Christianity is to be a militant religion. Her grandest hours have been when the spiritual forces of the Lord of hosts were in the field with banners flying.

There are signs of hope as a wave of concern sweeps through the ranks of Christendom. For instance, take two examples in my own denomination. Southern Baptists, in cooperation with the Japan Baptist Convention, are planning for 1963 an all-out crusade, involving a multitude of preachers and laymen, designed to

preach the gospel throughout Japan to confront this nation with the claims of Christ. Furthermore, plans are already in operation whereby our Foreign Mission Board and Radio and Television Commission are preparing to spread the gospel in every land by means of the mass communication of radio and television. It is our hope that on a scale never before achieved by our denomination we shall blanket the nations with the gospel of grace.

Third, we must be a people of absolute commitment to the cause of Christ. Jesus never promised us immunity from trouble. But He did promise His companionship and victory in the fray. Said He, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). But He waits on His people to make it a reality. In the first century Christianity triumphed because the Christians outthought, outworked, outsuffered, outwitnessed, outdied all other religions of that day. It must be so today, financially, physically, and spiritually.

Doctor B. David Edens quotes from a letter by a Communist to Christians. "The Gospel is a much more powerful weapon for the renewal of society than is our Marxist philosophy. All the same, it is we who will finally beat you. We are only a handful and you Christians are numbered by the millions . . . You, however, give only a little time and hardly any money for spreading of the Gospel of Christ. How can any of you believe in the supreme power of the Gospel if you do not spread it? And if you sacrifice neither time nor money for it? Believe me, it is we who will win, and we are ready to sacrifice everything, even our life, in order that justice may triumph. But you people are afraid to soil your hands."

Is this a true accusation?