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**The  
CHURCH  
and the  
WORKERS**

**by  
Bennett Stevens**

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## THE CHURCH AND THE WORKERS

BY BENNETT STEVENS

THE churches' support of royalty during the recent revolution in Spain, the pope's message on labor, and the concerted attacks of religious bodies all over the world against the Soviet Union, focus attention on the role of religion and the churches in the workers' struggle against their oppressors. The churches have always used their influence and resources to maintain reactionary rulers in power. The Peasants' Revolts at the close of the middle ages against the feudal princes were crushed by great slaughter with the active aid of both the Catholic and Protestant leaders. During the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe when the rising bourgeoisie was arrayed against the landed aristocracy and monarchy, the churches again joined with the reactionary forces. The French Revolution of 1789 and the revolutions of 1848 throughout Europe were all surging with anti-church spirit because the churches, as buttresses of the established order, passionately resisted the rise of the middle-class. But when the bourgeoisie became the ruling class, it in turn allied itself with the churches against the rising working class. In all capitalist countries the workers, fighting against those who profit from their toil, against those who are responsible for their poverty, for unemployment, for low wages, and miserable working and living conditions, find the churches directly and indirectly aiding the capitalist rulers.

### *The Class Teachings of the Church*

The doctrines and ritual of the churches are powerful means of developing attitudes of subservience among the workers. The

following passage from the Book of Common Prayer expresses the typical message of all religions:

(My duty to my neighbor is . . .) to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters . . . and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me.

The worker is taught to reconcile himself to his poverty, for it is "God's will"; he is asked to pray that he be dutiful to his employers, that he be meek, lowly, and submissive in the presence of his "betters." A supernatural power is pictured that will punish workers if they disobey the rules of order and self-respect which their rulers have established to keep them docile and obedient. Capitalism and its laws and practices are taught to be god-given creations; it becomes irreligious and wicked to challenge them.

Workers thwarted and depressed by their misery under capitalism are drawn to the churches by the social and recreational activities which the churches offer as a means of extending their influence. The church takes advantage of the desire of the workers to escape from the drabness of their lives. It offers warmth, music, and comfortable surroundings as an attractive contrast to the barren, cold, and dreary workers' quarters. Religious ritual with its mystic emotionalism is given as solace and consolation to offset the monotony of the hard working day. Workers are given glowing promises of bliss in a future "kingdom of heaven" which divert their attention from efforts to change conditions here. Rewards after death are promised to those workers who are "loyal servants of the Lord" and of their employers, and those who are rebellious are warned of future punishment. By these means the churches attempt to dull any active organized expressions of protest by the workers against their poverty. Religion thus serves, as Karl Marx said, "as the opiate of the people."

Churches teach that the sufferings and hardships of the workers are due, not to economic and political causes, but to the "wickedness" and "sinfulness" of man's character. In the words of a famous missionary and hymn writer:

I think Heaven's punishments are due  
To Atheism and Sedition too;  
I think for these 'tis God's own sending,  
And not because our laws need mending.

The churches declare that economic and political changes would be futile because it is not the fault of capitalism that the workers are exploited, but due to erring man who "does not live according to the laws of Christ." They contend that workers will be happier only through a "change in the hearts of men," through "purging hearts from sin," through "accepting the spirit of the living Christ," through "the saving of men's souls."

But men's lives are determined by their jobs, their wages, and the conditions which these permit. When the churches insist that the individual must be transformed before economic and political institutions can be changed, they not only contradict the facts of science but also paralyze efforts to change institutions that keep the masses in poverty.

The doctrine of "sin" aids the ruling class in another way. Workers are especially warned of the "sins" of "self-importance," of "false ambitions," and of "pleasure," lest they become restless and dissatisfied. The Protestant churches especially have, since their inception, aided the development of capitalism by their emphasis on abstinence and frugality and by their doctrine that wickedness is intrinsic in leisure. Work, no matter how laborious and unrewarded, is glorified as an end in itself. This is shown in the 1910 report of the Joint Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor of the Episcopal Church of the United States:

Much that is said of the emancipation of labor, much that is urged in certain kinds of socialistic writing and speaking, proceeds upon the assumption that work is an evil to get through in order that abundance of time may be given to pleasure. It is a false ideal. . . . There is a mission for the Church in meeting such ideals by the setting forth of the Christian ideal of service as willing work, as that which gives life value.

In other words, work for one's employer is made the prime purpose of life, the religious duty to which all else is secondary. The more docile the workers are in performing their daily jobs, the more they work for the glory of god. The worker is pictured as a lazy fellow and his religious employers feel a glow of righteousness in making it difficult for him to fritter away his time in "unproductive amusements." Long hours and a meager standard of living are considered but a kindness to the worker. The sight of a poor man amusing himself arouses a feeling of moral indignation in a well-trained religious capitalist.

Some employers are bringing Christianity directly into the factories. John E. Edgerton, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, Tennessee woolen manufacturer, bitter anti-unionist, and exploiter of child labor, in an address in 1930 before a Methodist audience, declared:

I am proud to say that morning prayer exercises in my factory have had the finest economic effects. Workers are producing far more goods than before the prayer system started some years ago. We have made it almost impossible for any one but a Christian to get a job. We have been able by that process to keep our plant free from trouble.

Religion is here used as a lubricating oil to speed up the workers, to increase production and to make them pliant to increased exploitation.

### *The Strength of the Churches*

The churches are effective propaganda agencies for they reached a membership of 50,000,000 persons in 1930. That capitalists are conscious of this fact is shown by the liberality of their donations to the churches. As one of his many contributions to the Episcopal church, J. P. Morgan paid the expenses involved in publishing the revised Book of Common Prayer. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in addition to building a seven million dollar church in New York, gives millions to Baptist col-

leges and other religious enterprises. In 1929 gifts to Protestant churches in the United States amounted to \$520,000,000. The churches are not "spiritual" institutions but are in themselves powerful, wealthy capitalist corporations and as such have special interests in preserving capitalism. Four billion dollars was the valuation set on 232,000 church buildings alone (not counting other church property investments) and churches spent \$817,000,000 in immediate expenses in 1926, only a very slight portion of which went to "benevolences." The following table indicates the value of church property and expenses of some of the largest sects in the United States in 1926:

<i>Churches</i>	<i>Value of Church Property</i>	<i>Expenses</i>
Roman Catholic .....	\$837,271,053	\$204,526,487
Methodist .....	654,736,975	152,151,978
Baptist .....	460,827,795	98,045,096
Presbyterian .....	443,572,158	87,535,390
Episcopal .....	314,596,738	44,790,130
Lutheran .....	273,409,748	59,500,845
Congregational .....	162,222,552	25,820,342
Jewish .....	97,401,688	19,076,451

The vast wealth of the churches, especially of the Catholic churches, comes not only from the capitalists but also from the hard-earned pennies of workers who do not realize the part the churches are playing as active agents of their employers.

The Salvation Army receives money from "community chests" for "service" among the workers which it uses to taunt workers about their "materialism" and to urge them to "come to Jesus." It had in 1926, buildings valued at \$17,738,506 while it spent \$6,001,317, over two-thirds of which went to salaries and improvements in property. Over seven hundred religious newspapers and magazines are published in the United States with a circulation of over 11,000,000 copies which serve to extend the reactionary influence of the churches into the homes. Youth organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. spread the control of the

churches over working class youth through their club activities—the former having the huge sum of \$230,060,000 in property and funds and spending in 1930 alone \$60,609,000 in operating expenses in the United States. By molding opinions of reverence for capitalist authority and by instilling attitudes that condemn rebellion as anti-social and against “the will of god” these powerful propaganda institutions yoke the masses to the churches and try to check any desire of the workers to resist injustices.

### *The Churches and the Unemployed*

Churches participate actively in the daily struggles between workers and employers. During the present economic crisis, when millions of workers are unemployed and employers are slashing the wages of those who remain on the job, the churches are particularly active in deluding the workers. Like all capitalist spokesmen they first did everything possible to keep up the illusion of prosperity and to deny that any depression existed. Some declared that it was a “sin” if starving, penniless workers did not “stem the crisis” by participating in “Buy Now” campaigns. A Methodist minister in New York distributed widely in January, 1931, a poem entitled, “Cheer Up Now,” containing such drivel as “Rebuke ranting rebellion,” “Preserve pellucid patience,” “Outspeak overt optimism.” A joint pronouncement of the Catholic Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops in the United States ascribed unemployment to “lack of good will,” to “neglect of Christ,” and urged as a remedy a “change of heart.” Workers who stand in Salvation Army bread lines find posters staring at them declaring “Business Depressions Are Caused by Dissipation, Dishonesty, Disobedience to God’s Will; a General Collapse of Moral Character.” A situation due entirely to the conditions of capitalist production is attributed to the evil character of men. Other churchmen are using the unemployment crisis to try to lower the living standards of the workers. A prominent Protestant clergyman vigorously declared: “Unemployment will cease when people



are converted to a belief in the Incarnate Christ, when they will surrender themselves to him and they will be willing to do without a great many things which they are now striving for." Another clergyman rejoiced that "the arrogance of labor will be humbled."

The main contributions of the churches to an unemployment crisis are prayers and charity. Prayers, of course, provide neither bread nor jobs. But they serve the purpose among church-going workers of turning attention and bitterness away from the real cause of their suffering—the capitalist system—and make it appear that change is only in the "power of god." This faith in the supernatural tends to prevent the workers from organizing to take matters in their own hands, to do away with these periodic crises that are characteristic of capitalism. It delays their recognition of the fact that the struggle against poverty and unemployment is one of class against class, that they must fight for better conditions, and that fundamental changes must be made and capitalism overthrown before these crises can be eliminated.

The churches have appealed for funds in employers' charity campaigns, because they realized that charity is a safety-valve against discontent and that it checks revolutionary struggle. By dispensing even a meager and limited relief, by giving the workers crumbs, they strive to keep them from responding to those who really have their interests at heart. By requiring church attendance of families receiving charity the churches attempt to bring more workers under their influence. In church missions unemployed workers must attend prayer meetings before they are given hand-outs or beds. When poor tenants are evicted for non-payment of rent and when unemployed workers are imprisoned on charges of vagrancy, the church is unconcerned. A few church "liberals" have urged mild reforms to tone down the resentment of the workers which may lead to militant action. One church group advocates the stagger system of employment which would result in making the workers who are not yet un-

employed bear the brunt of the crisis by dividing their work time with others and reducing their pay below an already meager wage. An employers' point of view dominates every statement of the churchmen.

### *The Churches in Strikes*

Churches can always be expected to take the side of the employers against the workers during strikes. For money speaks. The employers give the property, build the churches, hire the ministers, pay their salaries, and take care of other church expenses. They dominate the churches and the clergymen completely and use them as they do the schools and school teachers to develop loyalty to the capitalist class. The zeal of clergymen in defeating strikes is, however, usually more than that of persons who recognize that they must act in a certain way to retain their jobs. They thoroughly identify themselves with the capitalist class against the workers.

During the textile strike in Lawrence, Mass., led by the I. W. W. in 1912, church members paraded against the strikers with placards reading, "For God and for Country—the Stars and Stripes Forever—the Red Flag Never." In the great steel strike, led by William Z. Foster in 1919, not one prominent minister in the steel region spoke out in favor of the strikers, while many used as sermons the prepared publicity material of the companies and brought pressure to bear upon the workers to desert the strike. The churches' betrayal of the masses was so obvious that after the strike the Interchurch World Movement led by church "liberals," to retain the church's hold upon the masses, published a report revealing the conditions that led to the strike. This was promptly repudiated by the large church bodies who withdrew from the organization causing it to collapse and showing more clearly than ever the control of the capitalists over the churches. Another larger report, openly supporting the employers, was then issued, endorsed by churchmen, denouncing the first report as being financed by Soviet gold,

On the day the Seattle general strike was called in 1919, one hundred church delegates in convention in Seattle, in their attempt to stir up sentiment against the strikers, issued a statement resolving that the church "deplores the spirit of strike and confusion; that it commends to all men the solution of all social problems by the simple application of the principles enunciated by, and of the spirit of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ." Before and during the strike the churches did everything in their power to break the militant spirit of the workers by urging their members not to participate. They violently denounced the leaders of the strike as being in the pay of Moscow. During the many miners' strikes in Pennsylvania and Illinois, leaders of the strikers also had to meet the strenuous opposition of the priests and Protestant ministers who acted as strike-breaking agents, imploring the workers to return to the pits at reduced wages.

The Passaic strike in 1926 again illustrates the insidious role of the churches. Organizers found the local churchmen almost unanimously lined up against them, using their influence especially over the foreign-born to break the strike. The church "liberals" who came in to give some support to the strike actually directed their efforts toward arriving at a compromise through arbitration. Their plea was for the classes to come together "in conference," a procedure typical of "liberal" church agencies. In order to counteract the influence of the radical strike leaders in Passaic, the Department of Christian Social Service of the Episcopal church supported, by a large money contribution, a special propaganda campaign after the strike conducted by an ex-minister who later was put on the pay-roll of the American Federation of Labor.

In the textile strikes of the South, the hostility of the churches toward the workers has been most intense. Everywhere in the cotton mill towns such as Gastonia, Marion, and Bessemer City, N. C., local churches were active in undermining the fighting spirit of the strikers. In Gastonia, the churchmen incited hostility against the strikers among the more backward elements of the

workers to break their ranks in their fight against the mill owners. They helped the employers to stir up mob hatred against the strikers which culminated in the killing of Ella May Wiggins, an active union worker and mother of five. In Marion, N. C., and Danville, Va., where the strikes were under conservative leadership, local churches were nevertheless rabid against the strikers. In Marion they attempted to force the desertion of 100 strikers by dropping them from church membership. In both instances, outside "liberal" church agencies entered and furnished strike relief to allay discontent. They raised funds for this relief from among capitalists on the grounds that they were preventing violence and keeping the workers orderly.

In the most recent strike of the textile workers in Lawrence, in February, 1931, when 10,000 workers under the leadership of the National Textile Workers' Union, tied up the plants of the American Woolen Co. in a struggle against an "efficiency" system which meant greater speed-up for the workers, a Catholic priest called upon the strikers, the large majority of whom were Catholics, to meet in conference with him and come to terms with the employers. Resolutions against the strike were also passed by a body of Protestant ministers. In cooperation with a "citizens' committee" and the American Woolen Co., the priest carried on an energetic campaign with the slogans: "Labor and capital must get together," "Go back to work," "The American Woolen Co. is honest." When the strikers voted to refuse the invitation to a conference, the churches acquiesced in the campaign of terror unleashed against the strikers by the police, city and federal government, which resulted in the arrest and deportation proceedings against the strike leaders, the raiding of the union offices and intimidation and brutality against the strikers. Church bells were rung when the workers went back to work. Weeks after the strike, outside "liberal" church agencies protested against the police terror in an effort to save the reputation of the church among the workers.

When "liberal" churchmen enter a strike situation they aim to

curb the militancy of the strikers by encouraging a spirit of compromise and arousing false hopes of a favorable settlement. At a time when workers are on strike because of the intolerable conditions under which they must work, these clergymen declare that the employers are their friends, that there is no class struggle, and that "mutual interests" should lead to compromise.

Just as the churches participate in strike activity against the workers directly and indirectly, so too have they functioned in other phases of the class struggle. When the I. W. W. protected their hall in Centralia, Wash., and defended themselves against the assault of the American legion mob instigated by the lumber barons, and were put on trial for the death of four of their attackers, the clergymen of Washington helped to whip up hysteria against them. The First Christian Church of Centralia and its minister contributed toward the funds for the prosecution of the men. Eleven years after the event a joint investigation to determine whether "justice" had been done in the case was undertaken by leading church groups which failed to make positive recommendations for the release of the workers.

Only after 15 years had passed did a hundred ministers issue a typically weak statement asking for the release of Mooney and Billings. The churches have been absolutely silent in the case of Frank Spector and other organizers who are imprisoned by the powerful fruit growers' interests of California, because they attempted to organize the miserably exploited Mexican agricultural workers of the Imperial Valley. The vast majority of churchmen asked for the death of Sacco and Vanzetti and when on August 24, 1930, Communist speakers were arrested on Boston Common for attempting to hold a Sacco-Vanzetti memorial meeting, a Catholic Truth Guild speaker, permitted by the police to address the crowd, declared, "Whenever these Reds start action in this country they will find the Catholics in the front ranks opposing them."

## *The Christian Socialists*

The group most active in covering up the role of the churches as aids to capitalism are the so-called Christian Socialists. Sherwood Eddy recently struck the keynote of this group when he said, "If we do not Christianize the social order there are those who will communize it." The appeals of Ludlow, Maurice, and Kingsley, the founders of the Christian Socialist movement in England in 1848 were similar. They urged that Socialism "must be Christianized or it will shake Christianity to its foundations." They helped to defeat the militant Chartist movement during the forties when the workers fought to obtain the right to vote, previously restricted to the propertied classes in England.

Christian Socialists have come with pleas for "inward reforms" as against fundamental political changes. When workers begin to recognize the true nature of the class struggle, Christian Socialists begin to propagandize them for "Christian fellowship," for "a better understanding between the classes," and for "a study of the question in the light of Christian principles." Many of their statements in industrial crises are so phrased as to solicit the friendship of the workers but in every instance the underlying message is one of conciliation, non-violence, and surrender.

Christian Socialists are always upholders of religion rather than defenders of militant workers. John Haynes Holmes, Reinhold Niebuhr, Harry Emerson Fosdick (Rockefeller's pet preacher), Jerome Davis, and Francis J. McConnell are typical. Holmes claims to have become a Socialist in 1910 when he read that Socialism was the "economics of Christianity." He is against strikes and declares they are not "justified," contending that "their methods are detestable to every enlightened and compassionate soul."

These Christian Socialists and pacifists are merely advocating a "Back to Jesus" movement, when they criticise capitalists and preach against the "profit motive." They create a false picture of early Christianity as an ideal religion after which present religion

should be modeled rather than being rejected entirely. The workers' plight is piously considered "deplorable," "a disgrace to a Christian country." Employers are expected graciously to change their tactics, to stop underpaying workers, to refrain from competing with fellow capitalists when they realize that these practices are not according to "Christian ethics." The function of the church is thought to be to convince the erring capitalists that unless they quit being brutal and accept social reforms they will bring on revolution. At the same time workers are urged to cooperate with capitalists in terms of "Christian brotherhood" and non-violence. Militant action by workers to achieve their ends is condemned as "anti-social" and destructive and the class struggle is denied.

Christian Socialism is, then, in its actual effect, counter-revolutionary. Its reformism attempts to check rebellion among workers. Its main purpose is to put the brakes on aggressive action by the workers and to save them for the church by having them believe that the church is on their side.

The Reverend Norman Thomas (Presbyterian) and the Reverend A. J. Muste (Quaker) belong to this group of Christian Socialists. Their phrases are often radical, but whenever they set forth their objectives at length they reveal their true purpose. "Peaceful unionization now is the only alternative of bitter revolt in the future," wrote Thomas in a letter appealing for funds for the relief of the Danville strikers in 1931. He deceives many workers into believing that partial reform measures are steps toward Socialism. The Socialist Party under his leadership cooperates with the so-called liberal church groups in activities calculated to prevent workers from resorting to revolutionary action. Another leader of the Socialist Party declared after hearing the pope's recent radio message on labor: "There is nothing inconsistent between Socialism and Catholicism or any other organized religion. . . . We welcome the pope's conversion to our doctrine of labor . . ."

## *Catholicism on the Economic Front*

The Catholic church defends private property very violently against Communism. In the thirteenth century, during the Peasants' Revolts, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote a tract which the church still endorses, in which he stated that the doctrine of early Christian communism was all right for paradise but that private property must be defended on earth as a "necessity for weak human nature corrupted by the Fall of Man." Pope Leo XIII in 1891 issued the encyclical known as *Rerum Novarum* discussing the relations between capital and labor. It is the guide to action for the Catholic churches at present. He declared it to be the duty of the state to repress those who want to change the economic system which sacrifices the welfare of the masses to the profits of the few. He said:

(The primary purpose of the state is) the safeguarding by legal enactment and policy, of private property. Most of all it is essential in these times of covetous greed, to keep the multitude within the line of duty. . . . Neither justice nor the common good allows any one . . . under the pretext of futile and ridiculous equality to lay hands on other people's fortunes. . . . There are not a few who are imbued with bad principles and are anxious for revolutionary change. . . . The authority of the state should intervene to put restraint upon these disturbers.

*Rerum Novarum* was recently elaborated upon by the present pope Pius XI with much fanfare and publicity. Widely acclaimed in the capitalist press, it may be considered as representative of the position of all the churches toward the workers. The pope's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, presented under the guise of friendliness to the workers, urges them to accept their status, maintaining that the existing social classes are wise and god-given. In spite of the fact that in the Soviet Union, the capitalist class has been overthrown and the rule of the workers established, he declares that classes cannot be changed and that the worker must reconcile himself to his present lot in life:



The differences in social conditions in the human family which were wisely decreed by the Creator, must not and cannot ever be abolished. . . .

All opposition between the classes must cease and harmonious collaboration must be established between the various groups. . . .

All must work together, therefore, for the common good in complete harmony and discipline, each at his own post and in his own sphere, seeking only the interests of good and the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

While vaguely and hypocritically suggesting that the workers should receive wages "to satisfy the legitimate requirements of an honest workingman . . .", the pope warned the workers against struggle to get such wages, as if the employers will give them voluntarily. The above utterances of the pope are designed to encourage humility, subservience and non-resistance on the part of the workers. His slogans: "prayer, action, sacrifice" were also aimed to promote such attitudes. Prayer was defined as an "expression of the greatest faith"; action, promotion "of the peace of Christ among the classes" and sacrifice, "perseverance, method and discipline in your work, which demand the submission of your personal ideas and also demand your coordination and your subordination as workers."

While condemning "men for fixing their eyes on earthly goods", the pope demanded, on the same day as the delivery of his radio message, cash reparations of \$30,000,000 from the government of Spain for church property destroyed by revolutionary masses who were protesting against the churches which had amassed their wealth at the expense of the workers.

The pope recognized that since the time that *Rerum Novarum* was issued, what was then called Socialism, has divided into two groups, the Socialists and the Communists. He declared correctly that Socialism "has notably mitigated its program. . . . It has approached, now more, now less, so close to Catholic-Socialist principles that some are asking themselves whether now the divergence is not one of name only." Of Communism he states: "its teachings can in no wise be reconciled with the doctrines of the

Church", knowing as he does that Communists are fighting religious superstitions, are advocating the application of scientific and rational principles to society, and are determined to overthrow the capitalist class of which the churches are agents.

Following the principles set down in *Rerum Novarum*, the pope endorsed the christian labor unions which the church had organized in Europe to combat militant labor unions and to split the workers' front against the capitalists.

In the United States, christian labor unions have never been organized because the American Federation of Labor can be depended upon to oppose militant unions. While the A. F. of L. is controlled by reactionary leadership, the Catholic church will probably not organize separate unions here. But as soon as the workers in greater numbers become more revolutionary the church will become active in union work as it did in Europe. In an address during the 1930 American Federation of Labor convention in Boston, Cardinal O'Connell as usual quoted pope Leo's encyclical and called upon capital and labor "to cease their bitter fratricidal strife and come to terms of understanding and cooperation"—the typical religious plea of conciliation which in reality means that workers cease fighting and accept the conditions dictated by the employers.

The Catholic church has been one of the reactionary forces supporting the employers against such mild social legislation as the federal child labor amendment, the weak bill for maternity care, and legislation permitting the distribution of birth control information among the masses in the United States.

In July, 1930, John H. Ryan, rector of the Catholic University in Washington, was given special instructions by the pope to "beware lest Bolshevism spread in America at this moment of financial depression and unemployment." This has always been the guiding principle of the work of the Department of Social Action of the National Catholic Welfare Conference whose director is the "liberal" John A. Ryan. "Justice to the working man" has been a slogan to keep workers under the church's

domination and to prevent them from participating actively in a movement that has for its aim the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a government that serves the interests of the masses.

### *The Synagogue*

Just as each of the christian sects hypocritically claims to be friendly to labor so many Jewish leaders maintain that Judaism stands for "social justice" for the workers. They point to passages in the Old Testament and in Jewish lore which protest against injustice. But watch the synagogues in action. Like the churches they are built and maintained by the propertied classes to preserve established moral standards and loyalties to the existing system. Both the conservative orthodox and modern reform synagogues offer prayers for those in authority. The orthodox synagogues divert the attention of the Jewish workers from their participation in the struggle to change the institutions which oppress them, by attempting to make them slavish followers of Jewish doctrine, ritual, and tradition. The synagogues foster group loyalty among workers, which serves to obscure class consciousness. The synagogues have played no part in fighting sweatshop conditions in the needle trades where Jews have predominated or in bettering the notorious working conditions in the department stores, numbers of which are controlled by Jews. Rabbis fear to criticize any aspect of capitalism. They justify their cowardice by claiming that they do not want to stir up anti-semitism. In the face of class conflict they support those who pay their salaries.

Reform Judaism is a small upper middle-class sect. It promotes bourgeois standards and complacent acceptance of the present system. A small group of reform rabbis, ashamed of being merely fawners to the rich of their congregations, assume the role of social reformers and cooperate with other "liberal" church bodies. They have formulated a reformistic "social justice" pro-

gram. The large majority of reform rabbis, although formally endorsing the program, give no publicity to this futile scrap of paper. The synagogue stresses the giving of charity to the poor, an act which salves the conscience of the giver—who has built his wealth by taking it from the workers—establishes his prestige as a philanthropist, and at the same time serves the function of checking the resentment of the workers.

Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York City occasionally intervenes to demand that the bosses arbitrate labor disputes. He has stated repeatedly that his chief objective in so doing is to avoid the spread of Communism and to prevent "labor unrest." He wants to refine the methods of capitalism so that it can maintain itself more effectively.

### *The Church and the Negro Workers*

Negro workers in the United States have been most victimized by religion. As a southern Negro work song expresses it:

While nigger, he busy, wit' Bible and pray  
White folks dey's stealing de whole Eart' 'way.  
White folks use whip, white folks use trigger  
But 'twere Bible an' Jesus made slave of the nigger.

Negroes would still be legal slaves if the churches had had their way. In 1845 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church declared that it could not demand the release of slaves by its members "without contradicting some of the plainest declarations of the word of God. . . . The Assembly cannot therefore denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily heinous and scandalous sin and calculated to bring on the Church of Christ the curse of God, without charging the Apostles of Christ with conniving at sin." Over a hundred ministers of all faiths in the South published in 1863 a statement which read:

We consider Abolitionism as an interference with the designs of Divine Providence. It does not possess the signs of the Lord's blessing. . . . We declare in the sight of God that the relation of master

and slave, much as we deplore abuses in this as in other human institutions, is not incompatible with our faith.

When the Negroes were "freed" over the protest of the churches, the latter continued their efforts to enslave the Negroes by keeping them in ignorance and through teaching them submission and servility. The Negro churches of the North and South alike are financed chiefly by funds of white landowners and industrialists who wish to "keep the Negro in his place." Denied cultural and social equality and deprived of educational opportunities, the Negroes find in the churches their means of self-expression. The high emotionalism of the Negro churches is encouraged by the whites to offer a release that would otherwise take the form of revolt against the disgraceful conditions under which Negroes are forced to work and live. The Ku Klux Klan is financed by Protestant capitalists who wish to keep the Negroes economically and culturally degraded. It is led by Baptist and Methodist clergymen. Participants in the lynching parties are usually "respectable" church members.

The churches are active in maintaining all the discriminations against Negroes, the Jim Crow laws, and other restrictions. The delegates at a meeting of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1929 rejected a proposal offered by its Commission on Social Service recommending "the removal of discriminations which prevent equal opportunity of development for all races and for the equal sharing of rights and privileges." Racial equality for the Negroes is abhorrent to the vast majority of white churchmen. When the Communist Party went into the South organizing Negro and white workers together and demanding full economic, political, and social equality for Negroes, the southern churches incited mob violence against its organizers. Negro ministers joined in the attack, advising the Negroes to "wait patiently for the Lord" to help them, and proclaiming the fine virtues of their white masters. The southern churches have succeeded in keeping the Negroes virtually in slavery which they would have prolonged legally had they had the power.

## *The Church as an Imperialist Agent*

The church reciprocates for the support of the state by valiant service in the interests of imperialism. During the last imperialist war churches created hatreds and passions and urged men to go out to die "for Christ and country"—to fight "the battle of the Lord." They blessed flags; held patriotic services; stirred up venom among workers to slaughter workers in other lands, to protect and expand the markets of the capitalists. Clergymen, exempt from military service because of the greater assistance they could give the government as recruiting agents, participated directly and indirectly in the promotion of the war hysteria and in the drives that financed the war. The extreme war spirit of the religious bodies was typified in a Y.M.C.A. manual which instructed the soldiers: "Never miss an opportunity to destroy the eyes of the enemy. . . . The eyes can easily be removed with the finger." Protestant bibles were distributed to the soldiers with the inscription of President Wilson reading, "The Bible is the word of God. I request you to read it." The Catholics distributed their own version of the New Testament containing a foreword by Cardinal Gibbons which shows how closely the church is tied up with the capitalist state:

Called . . . to the service of your country, love for its soil and for its people must necessarily be the mainspring of all your military activities. In these respects Christ our Lord is your example. . . . Your first and important duty is prompt and cheerful obedience to the commands of your superiors. The sanction for it is found in these words in the New Testament: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers for there is no power but from God, and those that are ordained of God.

Catholics, through the Knights of Columbus, Protestants through the Y.M.C.A., and Jews through the Jewish Welfare Board, tried to keep the spirits of the soldiers high as they were being prepared for slaughter. The churches functioned also to salve the pain of the relatives of the victims of the war by fervid

sermons on the glory of martyrdom and the beauties of immortality. Protests of the suffering were soothed and given emotional release by prayer, preventing resentment against the war.

Synagogues, orthodox and reform, participated in the war mania and became super-patriotic. The Jewish Publication Society which had carried a seal on the binding of its books reading, "Israel's Mission is Peace," effaced it.

The churches have always participated in imperialist ventures to extend capitalist markets. In the United States, since the time when the Puritans first fell on their knees (and then on the aborigines!) the churches have supported the state in aggressive exploitation of the American Indians. The Board of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society received gifts of \$485,000 securities, belonging to the Indians of Oklahoma, from Commissioner Burke of the U. S. Bureau of Indian affairs, as a reward for its active work in assisting in defrauding the Indians of their land.

When the United States government grabbed the Philippines, the Catholic Archbishop Ireland of St. Paul, Minn., publicly put the church's stamp of approval upon the act. Later the Archbishop wrote: "McKinley realizes . . . the services I have rendered him."

Missionary societies send their angels of imperialism to open markets for the capitalists in all parts of the world and to prepare the way for the exploitation of the workers. Chinese territory has been annexed by the imperialists as compensation for the death of missionaries who imposed themselves on the natives. Germany, for example, taking advantage of the murder in Shantung of two German Roman Catholic missionaries in 1895, seized Tsingtau and forced from China a 99-year lease to Kiaochow, including the port of Tsingtau, and exclusive railway and mining concessions in Shantung. After the Boxer rebellion in 1900 against the imperialists and their missionary agents, China was looted by foreign armies with the christian missionaries sharing the loot. Indemnities of over 450,000,000 taels in which the Americans

shared—a tael is equivalent to 64 cents—were exacted from the Chinese. Missionary claims for indemnity were not presented directly to the Chinese government but through foreign governments which had armies ready to take them. In 1928, Catholics and Protestants spent at least \$15,000,000 for missionary work in China.

Recently, Chiang Kai-shek, his hands still wet with the blood of thousands of Chinese workers, peasants and students, bid for imperialist support against the growing Communist movement in China, by becoming a convert to Christianity. When the missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, a church which shares in the responsibility for the lynching of Negroes in the United States, baptised him, he declared that Chiang “and the spirit of Jesus Christ within him will go marching on”—to continue his attacks on the revolutionary Chinese workers. Chiang’s conversion was hailed joyfully by Christians in the United States who immediately sought funds to support him in his campaign. The Catholics joined in the hallelujah’s. *The Commonweal*, a Catholic weekly, proclaimed the conversion as a challenge to the Soviet Union.

A letter soliciting funds was sent out in March, 1931, by a New York organization called the China Child Welfare, Inc., supported partly by missionary groups. The Christian Socialist Methodist bishop, Francis J. McConnell, is one of its directors, and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise is a member of its national committee. The letter read in part:

Bolshevism with all its ills and degradation is trying to get the upper hand in China. Help the New Republic of China to build on the teachings of Jesus Christ and away from Bolshevism.

This is the typical appeal of missionary societies and their subsidiary organizations which, through their activities, assist imperialist armies to prevent successful revolutions of the exploited masses.



## *The State and Religion in the United States*

As the purpose of state power in capitalist countries is to preserve capitalism, it is not surprising to find the state directing all its efforts to the perpetuation of agencies like the church that strengthen the hold of capitalists over their workers. When Peter Bogdanov, Chairman of the Amtorg Trading Corporation, a Soviet Union commercial agency, appeared as witness before the Fish Committee which was investigating Communist activities in the United States, he refused to take the religious oath. Asked by Representative Nelson whether he belonged to any sect, he answered that he thought religion in the United States had no connection with state matters. Nelson replied, "Understand that religion does have a place in this country and in our courts of law." This is a correct and frank statement of the fact that all the propaganda that there is religious freedom in the United States is utterly false. Judicial decisions have definitely and repeatedly declared this country to be a "Christian country" and have been outspoken in their recognition of the aid which religion offers established institutions. Note the following typical decision:

The same reasons of state policy which induced the government to aid institutions of charity and seminaries of instruction will incline it to foster religious worship and religious institutions as the conservators of public morals and valuable if not indispensable assistants in the preservation of public order. (First M.E. Church So. v. Atlanta 76 Ga. 181.)

Atheists, and even those who believe in God but do not believe in immortality, are discriminated against in the courts of many states. In the famous Gastonia, N. C., textile strike when seven Communist strike leaders were tried for murder after the death of the chief of police who had led an unprovoked attack on the workers' headquarters, a defense witness was impeached because she did not believe in a "supreme being who punishes you for your wrongdoing and rewards you for virtues." The decision,

based on a statute passed in 1777 which requires a witness to believe in divine punishment after death, was later upheld by the Supreme Court of North Carolina. Soon after this a judge in New Jersey disqualified a Communist as a witness because he denied belief in god. Maryland requires as a qualification both of witnesses and jurors that they believe in "the existence of God and that under his dispensation such person will be held morally accountable for his acts and be rewarded or punished therefore in this world or the world to come." In New Hampshire a "person who openly avowed that he had no belief in God" cannot be admitted to testify in court. This is also true in Illinois, Arkansas, and Delaware. In the Federal courts, also, witnesses have been disqualified who have not believed in a god who punishes and rewards. It is still being debated whether under Federal practice non-believers in a state that discriminates against them may apply for a patent, trade-mark, copyright or passport. In the face of these discriminatory laws, there is, of course, no religious freedom in the United States. Religious freedom means at most the freedom to choose a brand of religion—it does not mean freedom for the non-believer.

The oath is not the only instance of religious discrimination. There are blasphemy laws in a large number of states which have been used against militant workers as in the case of Anthony Bimba, who was arrested on a charge of blasphemy in 1926 when he was addressing a meeting in Brockton, Mass. In many states workers are prevented from enjoying their only day of rest by Blue Laws enforced through the power of christian fundamentalists.

States help support the churches by exempting church property from taxation. In many states, children must listen to the reading of the bible daily in the public schools and in some states to daily prayers. In several states where the churches control the legislatures, the teaching of evolution is forbidden in the public schools. Churches are permitted to maintain parochial schools whose primary purpose is to inculcate religion in the

workers' children. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews have recently united to have legislation passed setting aside a part of the school day to the various church bodies for religious teaching. In fact, the primary purpose of the much heralded "cooperation of faiths," has been to intensify the reactionary campaign against atheists and non-believers and to strengthen the hold of the churches over the minds of the masses. A movement is now on, led by the Reformed Presbyterian church, to incorporate into the U. S. Constitution the name of god and for the constitutional recognition of Christianity as a national religion.

### *The Church and the Soviet Union*

In the United States, as in all capitalist countries, the churches, by developing law-abiding attitudes through their appeal to fear of an avenging god, become part of the repressive apparatus, equally with the police, the army, and the prisons, for the purpose of attempting to prevent rebellion and keep the masses in subjection. As Lenin once said: "All oppressing classes need two social functions to safeguard their domination: the function of the hangman and the function of the priest."

On the other hand, the Soviet Union under a workers' and peasants' government, is the only country in the world where religion and the churches are being combated with the active cooperation of the government.

The capitalist press of the world has spread false propaganda about the anti-religious work of the Soviet Union. When considering the relation of the Soviet government to the churches, it must be remembered that the 400,000 priests and monks of the Russian churches were active counter-revolutionary agents before and during the revolution, supporting the Tsar and the anti-Soviet armies against the revolutionary workers. During the great famine of 1921, when the peasants were dying from hunger, the churches refused to contribute from their enormous resources for food and

medicine in the hope that the famine would lead to the downfall of the Soviets.

But the conflict has deeper roots. For the Soviet government has for its prime objective the fullest possible development of the masses, and the churches have been the bulwarks of reaction and ignorance. As militant materialists the Soviet leaders are uncompromising in their scientific and atheistic position. They have met the attack of the churches by teaching the illiterate masses to read and write, by offering them opportunities for culture and recreation, by training them to know and to make use of the contributions of science. Russians who were awed, cowed, and terror-stricken in pre-revolutionary days by ignorant priests and their supernaturalism and magic are responding with alacrity to the enlightenment campaign of the government. They find the fertilizers and tractors provided by the government far more effective means of obtaining a good crop than the prayers for rain by the priests upon which they formerly depended. Rows of icons are being supplanted with bookshelves and holy candles with radio tubes. As a result, the churches, although permitted to function in the Soviet Union without direct interference, find their congregations diminishing rapidly. At the request of the workers, church buildings are being transformed into schools, museums and workers' clubs.

The churches formerly gained their tenacious hold upon the masses by their indoctrination of the youth. They impressed these immature minds with the supposed horrible consequences of disbelief and in this way held sway over them later in life. For this reason, the Soviet government has prohibited the teaching of religion to children until they are old enough to have critical judgment. The fear of the supernatural having been dispelled through scientific education, few people upon attaining adulthood now join the churches. As a result church membership is largely confined to old people, unable to adapt themselves to the new life and to free themselves from their superstitions. As the churches get no financial help from the government and compulsory collections

for the benefit of the churches are prohibited, the wealth of the churches is not being replenished except by voluntary contributions from their meager membership. They are dwindling decrepit vestiges of a defeated society. In emancipating the workers the new society has placed the Catholic priests, Protestant, Jewish, and Mohammedan clergymen, in their proper category, with the medicine-men of primitive peoples.

As the anti-religious campaign in the Soviet Union succeeds, the religious forces of the world are organizing and supporting interventionist movements to destroy the workers' state. When the Soviet Union in 1930 was extending its collectivist program among the peasants, many of whom were being stirred up to rabid opposition by the priests, who were in league with the rich kulaks, the pope declared a holy crusade on the Soviets in which Protestant and Jewish leaders joined. Imperialists made good use of their agents to prepare sentiment for war. Interventionist plans failed, but agitation by the churches continues to lay the basis for an attack upon the workers' government. Recently, the pope ordered that prayers against the Soviet Union must be said daily by priests and people together after every mass. The churches recognize that their existence is threatened by a workers' government whose purpose it is to enlighten and emancipate the masses, and they are using their great wealth and power in an attempt to destroy it.

### *Combatting Religion*

Many individuals and groups are warring on the reactionary teachings of the churches. Some of these are merely seeking to bring religion up to date in the hope that it may survive. They are no less active than other churchmen in directing attention away from the realities of the class struggle and in trying to give workers the illusion of happiness in the midst of poverty.

Religion can not be reformed. Whatever its doctrine and ritual, it remains an agency by which the capitalist class enforces its

control. The program of those who want to reform existing religion must, therefore, be rejected.

There are those who speak vaguely in terms of "free thought" and "rationalism." They resent the anti-scientific tyranny of the churches but ignore the more dangerous activity of the churches in keeping the masses docile and subservient to the ruling class. They devote most of their energies to showing the contradictions in the bible and the church's opposition to the spread of science and its perpetuation of superstition. But this propaganda against religion fails to get at the root of the power of the churches which is in the oppression of the masses under capitalism. Lenin has effectively criticized the work of these rationalists and bourgeois atheists:

The fight against religion must not be confined to abstract preaching. The fight must be linked up with the concrete practical class movement directed toward eradicating the social roots of religion. . . . The roots of religion today are to be found in the social oppression of the masses, in their apparently complete helplessness in the face of the blind forces of capitalism which every day and every hour cause a thousand times more horrible pain and suffering to the workers than disasters like wars and earthquakes.

No educational books will obliterate religion from the minds of those condemned to the hard labor of capitalism, until they themselves learn to fight in a united, organized, systematic, and conscious manner the roots of religion, the domination of capitalism in all its forms.

It is necessary to link the fight against the church and religion with the fight against capitalism and imperialism. As long as capitalism exists, religion and the churches will be used for the ends of the capitalist class. Many workers suffering from exploitation will resort to prayer and other forms of church magic in the hope of escaping from their misery. Workers who seek the church because of despair must recognize that in this way they are merely having their economic chains tied about them more closely. Prayer will not change their condition. To do so they

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