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Ecumenism—Militant or Defeatist?

BY SIR ARNOLD LUNN

I WAS bred in an ecumenical climate, for my father, the late Sir Henry Lunn, was a pioneer of the ecumenical movement. He began as a Methodist missionary in India, where his health broke down. On his return to Europe he devoted himself to the reunion of the churches and my first clear memory is of Grindelwald in 1892, the venue chosen for the first of the reunion conferences which my father convened and which he reported in *The Review of the Churches*, which he edited. The Travel Agency, Sir Henry Lunn Ltd., developed out of these conferences, the travel arrangements for which were made by my father. (The agency no longer belongs to the family.)

The relations between the different churches are incomparably friendlier than they were at the end of the last century, and for this my father certainly deserves some credit, for the Grindelwald conferences made a very real contribution to ecumenical relations, but my father was aware of certain dangers in the movement. I remember a conversation with him shortly after the various Methodist communions had reunited. He was one of the speakers at the meeting which celebrated this reunion, and I am sure that his speech contained all the remarks which were expected, but to me he said: "Of course I'm pleased about Methodist reunion, but I don't mind admitting to you that there was a lot more life in Methodism when the Primitive Methodists doubted the salvation of all the other Methodists than there is today".

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The problem of the ecumenist is to ensure that we retain the fervour of our own beliefs while showing greater understanding of those we do not share. Increasing tolerance must not coincide with increasing indifference. The secularists are only too ready to imply that it is only because Christians have far less confidence in the dogmas for which their ancestors would have sent each other to the stake that we hear so much about the reunion of the churches.

I am, like my father, an ardent ecumenist and I have co-operated with an Anglican, Garth Lean, in the writing of two books, *The New Morality* and *The Cult of Softness*, in which we defended the traditional Christian beliefs and moral code. Both of us are convinced that the beliefs which we share are incomparably more important than the beliefs which separate us. Both of us believe that the ecumenical movement is of great value in so far as it is an effective and *militant* alliance between *real* Christians who are united in resistance to those who are determined to suppress not only the Christian faith but also Christian morals.

A sound ecumenical policy depends on a discerning diagnosis of the position of Christianity in the modern world. In 1888 when I was born,

the great majority of the British were at least nominal supporters of Christian faith and morals, even if it was only a minority who made a serious attempt to practise the Christian religion. Today secularism is, in effect, the dominant philosophy of Great Britain. It is not easy to estimate how much of the secularist success is due to the sensational triumphs of communism, which is the political manifestation of militant atheism. "The Communist empire," as Whittaker Chambers rightly insisted in his book *Cold Friday*, "born in chaos, backward and weak beyond the imagination of the average man of the West, has, nevertheless, in the course of four decades, possessed itself of a third of the earth's land surface and hundreds of millions of new population, precisely at the expense of the West which, in all material ways, is enormously superior to it, and whose survival it now challenges." The fact is that the militant atheists are an organized and dedicated minority with something of the apostolic zeal of the first Christians.

The technique by which a dedicated minority achieves its ends may be illustrated from sport. In my own sport, ski-ing, there is always great competition to be entrusted with the organization of the World Ski Championship. In all cases where the vote is fairly close the Soviet controlled minority, Russia, Poland, Jugoslavia, etc., is decisive. The representatives of a country, competing for the world championship, will therefore be very reluctant to vote against any proposal sponsored by the Russians. This explains Russia's success in securing Olympic recognition for seven events which the Russians have every hope of winning, seven events in which there is very little interest outside Russia—four cross country ski races of different lengths for women and three speed skating races for women. It would have been amply sufficient to have offered one Olympic gold medal for women's cross country ski racing and one for women's cross country skating. In sport the Russians are as successful in making rings round the free world as in more important matters.

The only effective method of preventing the Communist minority dominating any international body, from the United Nations to sport federations, is for the non-communist majority to meet informally to consider any Communist proposal to be brought before the body in question and to decide among themselves whether the proposal is to be supported or to be opposed. A majority decision must then be *unanimously* supported by every member of the non-communist majority, thus depriving the Russians of all hope of bribing non-communist representatives.

It is with communism as the dedicated representatives of materialistic atheism that we are concerned. Again and again we find evidence of an informal working alliance between actual communists and atheists who would not describe themselves as communists in the attack on Christian faith and morals. And it is, I believe, this informal alliance which explains the success of the secularists in increasing their influence in the press and on the B.B.C.

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Even more damaging than the overt attacks on Christianity by those who do not claim to be Christian is the erosive influence of those

who may generically be described as the New Moralists, and who feel that it is, to quote one of them, "very little use to have a morality which will only be taken notice of by about two per cent of the nation". True enough, if there were no essential difference between a church and a political party which must attempt to secure the support of a majority of the electors. Is God then a constitutional monarch who must act on the advice of his ecclesiastical ministers, and who must adjust His moral laws to the changing views of the human electorate? Or is God an absolute monarch whose laws do not require human endorsement and who demands the unconditional obedience of Christians, even if only two per cent of the nation still accept Christianity? It is the belief in the infallibility of the Gallup poll which separates the believers in constitutional theism from the believers in absolute theism.

One of the more sensational exponents of this new morality is the Rev. H. A. Williams, Fellow and Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge, who in his contribution to *Soundings*, a collection of essays by Cambridge theologians, suggests that in very exceptional cases sexual relations outside marriage may be "an act of charity which proclaims the glory of God", or an act of healing, and that "where there is healing there is Christ, whatever the Church may say about fornication". The Archbishop of Wales challenged Mr. Williams to say categorically that fornication is a sin. He replied (*Church Times*, 11 January 1963): "I believe goodness consists in generous self-giving and evil in refusal or incapacity to give. I can conceive of circumstances where such generous self-giving is present in a sexual union outside marriage. And, where sex outside marriage is the medium of self-giving of this kind, then I would unhesitatingly say that it is not sinful".

No less revolutionary is an essay *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*, which was published in February 1963. The eleven Quaker authors quote Pavlov, Tillich, Peter Wildeblood, Sir Alan Herbert, the Bishop of Woolwich, and numerous other "authorities" on sex, but *do not once quote the words of Christ*, and only quote the words of St. Paul to ridicule them. They refuse to "condemn or prohibit" homosexuality as such. They speak of masturbation as "a natural and reasonable relief" in various circumstances, and feel justified in "rejecting almost completely the traditional approach of the organized Christian church to morality". What is left of Christ and his teaching by the time these friends have sown their Quaker oats?

These eccentric Anglicans and Quakers are anything but typical, but it is eccentricity which makes news. A bishop who explained why he believed in the Resurrection might find it difficult to obtain a publisher, but let him attack or belittle the historic doctrines of the Faith and he may expect to have the world at his feet. "One might be pardoned for supposing," writes Professor E. L. Mascall, of the Bishop of Woolwich in his recent book *The Secularization of Christianity*, "that Robinson had despaired of trying to convert the world to Christianity and had decided instead to convert Christianity to the world . . . he is, in fact, so anxious to claim as a Christian anyone who, in spite of his profession of atheism or agnosticism, evidences a

serious and generous attitude to life, that he is ready to atheize or agnosticize the Christian faith to almost any extent to bring the professing unbeliever within it". "Of all subjects," says Professor Mascall, "theology is that in which it is most important not to be slipshod", but what could be more slipshod than for a bishop who is, I hope, a Christian theist, to write so ambiguously that Mr. David Tribe, President of the National Secular Society, can scarcely be accused of deliberate misrepresentation when he writes :

"An extract from the Bishop of Woolwich's latest book, *The New Reformation?*, appearing in a Sunday paper last week-end, was entitled CAN A TRULY CONTEMPORARY PERSON NOT BE AN ATHEIST? Dr. Robinson clearly now believes not. Of course he flies through the shower of atheism and sees Jesus shining on the other side, and thus contrives to be both an atheist and a Christian. . . . Dr. Robinson is to be congratulated for recognizing the truth in charges that God is 'intellectually superfluous', 'emotionally dispensable', and 'morally intolerable' . . ."

Though I hope and believe that Dr. Robinson's christological beliefs are more orthodox than appears from his writings he has certainly raised the question as to "how far is Christianity committed to a mythological or supernaturalist picture of the universe at all", and it is passing strange that he does not realize that if we reject the miracles in general and the Resurrection in particular, Christianity is doomed. What remains? Some unreliable legends about a deluded Galilean peasant with a grossly inflated conception of his importance, who offered no evidence whatever for his fantastic claims to divinity. Our records of his teaching, which these extreme modernists profess to revere, are so interwoven with the record of miracles that they cannot be accepted as authentic if the miracles are myths. "If Christ be not risen then is our preaching in vain." Those who reject what the bishop calls "the supernaturalist picture of the universe" should be honest enough to join the Unitarians, even though the endowments and status of the Unitarians leave much to be desired.

The modernists may be convinced that traditional Christianity cannot be rationally defended and may be inspired by a genuine conviction that many who reject miracles can be lured back to the Church if the Church offers them a non-miraculous Christianity. I am convinced that the modernists are profoundly mistaken. I rejected Christianity while I was at Harrow and considered myself to be an agnostic for many years. I read the works of the leading modernists, Loisy and Tyrrell, but knew that if ever I returned to any form of Christianity it would be to a Christianity which based itself on the supreme miracle of the Resurrection. I have in my long life met many men who have returned from agnosticism to Christianity, but I have yet to meet a man who has returned from agnosticism to modernism.

Again I am convinced that the young are repelled rather than attracted by any attempt to water down the Church's exacting code of Christian morals. In my agnostic youth I knew very well that if it

could be shown that Christ *did* rise from the dead the Christian sexual code would have to be accepted. And I am sure that young people today suspect clerics of trying to "suck up" to them if they play up to the secularist conceptions of sexual morality. I would be very interested to learn what success Mr. Glen Cavaliero has had as chaplain to the Anglican students in Edinburgh. His views will be found in a collection of theological essays, published under the title *traditional virtues reassessed*, edited by the Rev. A. R. Vidler. Dr. Vidler may have adopted the anti-capital letter fashion, in which the egalitarianism of our age finds typographical expression, to suggest some slight demotion for the traditional virtues, lower case for chastity. But has Mr. Cavaliero retained a single about-to-lapse undergraduate in the Church by assuring him that "chastity could be attributed to some non-marital relationships in so far as genuine love and self-commitment be there", or insisting that "charity versus chastity is a live issue today". Why *versus*? Is it not possible to be *both* charitable and chaste?

*Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis
Tempus eget*

The lapsed Christian will not be persuaded to return to the citadel of the Faith by the display of a white flag on the ramparts.

* * * *

"All eclectics," said Novalis, "are sceptics", and the first task of all those who are convinced supporters of the ecumenical movement is to provide convincing evidence of the fact that the ecumenical movement which we support is inspired by the determination to *re-emphasize*, not to modify, the revealed truths in which we believe. Increasingly friendly relations with all those who unhesitatingly accept the deity of our Lord and the miracles, notably the Resurrection, by which he proved His claim, must lead to increasingly effective resistance to the infiltration of camouflaged unitarianism into any Christian church.

The unending battle between the authentic Christian and the secularist is of infinite importance for the future of our country, and the success or failure of the ecumenical movement will be determined by whether this movement does or does not result in an effective and *militant* alliance between *genuine* Christians against the forces of overt and disguised secularism. Unfortunately there are timid Christians for whom the ecumenical movement is not a summons to battle but an excuse for pacifism. A member of my own communion who, perhaps, feels that it is no asset in his profession to be a member of the Church of Rome has tried to convince his fellow Catholics that nothing is ever gained by apologetics and argument. What is certain is that if Christians had the apostolic zeal and courage of communists the case for Christianity would be presented far more effectively than it is on media of communication such as television and the B.B.C.