

## CHIC BOLSHEVIK PUNDITS, NAIVE DUPES, USEFUL IDIOTS AND ARA BALIOZIAN

"About sixty years ago, one of our eminent bishops wrote a book in which he proved (by quoting appropriate passages from the Scriptures and the works of Stalin) that Communism and Christianity might as well be synonymous. What is even more astonishing is that he was believed by a substantial segment of the Armenian-American community and the Diaspora in general.

Was this bishop a naive dupe (or, as Lenin would say, a "useful idiot") of Kremlin propagandists or a cunning Machiavellian eager to advance his own career in the hierarchy of our Church?

Does it really matter?

The result was that the Armenian-American community was effectively divided and stands divided to this day".

Notes & Comments By Ara Ballozian  
*The Armenian Reporter Int'l, April 3 1993*

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Leslie Dewart, one can assume, is neither a "naive dupe" nor a "useful idiot" attached to Kremlin propaganda. In his book The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age (Herder and Herder, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1968) he mentions an old proverb that "a good man deserves an enemy to tell him his faults" and goes on to state that "a hostile critic is an invaluable aid also in the cultivation of one's truth".

He does not go out in search of an enemy or a hostile critic. They have been with us as far back as Western man has attempted to integrate Christian theism with his contemporary experience. The least that we have to concede is that such attempts predate both being "cunning Machiavellians" or "chic Bolshevik pundits".

Leslie Dewart maintains it to be a historical fact that "our atheism is indigenous....modern atheism is the atheism of the Christian world." And he asks, "Does not the very existence of atheism in the midst of a culture which is historically theistic, a culture which despite its apostasy remains culturally and anthropologically describable in no other terms than Western Christendom, tell us something

about the nature of Christian theism?" He goes on to set a task for himself and for us "to suppose, therefore, that if a Christian should wish to understand, appreciate and develop the truth of his own theistic belief (we) might usefully approach the subject through a consideration of atheism."

In one form or another, relating the faith to the existential imperatives comes to us from the Apostolic Age. More often than not the conflict, or the attempt at reconciliation, was not primarily between the Christian world and the world out there. Admittedly, there were enough such hostile clashes, but the real conflict was from within, between the preachers of the Gospel and the theologian/philosophers.

An earlier dispute among the Apostles (Paul vs. Peter) was settled (Acts, 15) with relative ease. Later Arius came along and attempted to conform to the requirements of logic. As Dr. Hagop Nersoyan puts it, his problem was, being well trained in logic, he wanted to place within the framework of the human mind the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This is the same offence that the successive heretics or un-orthodox tinkers were accused of and were dismissed or anathematized for. The Enlightenment's French Encyclopedist attempted the same, applying the rule of reason to actual life. Rationality was to raise mankind to the height of an intellectual civilization, they maintained, and stumbled upon such concepts as "natural morality". The verdict of history? As many movements decline, the Enlightenment went down from an overemphasis on its own principle.

Reformation too, almost on a parallel course, was an unfortunate abortive issue, namely an attempt to integrate Christian belief with the post-medieval stage of human development.

Let us hasten to say that we are not talking about the beneficial by-products of these movements in the national-political-economic spheres of nations and their histories. What we are focusing on is the attempt for "Christianity to integrate its belief with a human experience which is no longer remotely like that of the world in which that faith was born, or that of the world which that faith fashioned for itself when the world in which it was born collapsed and



disappeared." (L.D.)

Now, who would undertake a task like this? For sure, not a full-time polemicist like Ara Baliozian; certainly not I, an occasional preacher of the Gospel conditioned by pastoral considerations. The challenge has to be taken up by the thinker, theologian/philosopher who would work in the intellectual trenches, as it were, wage spiritual warfare, pushing the frontiers of faith into the enemy's territory.

There is a tale of a legendary saint who encountered an angel walking down the road with a torch in one hand and a pail of water in the other. When asked what they were for, the angel replied: The torch is to burn down the castles of heaven and the water is to put out the flames of hell and then we shall see who really loves God.

We had such an "angel" who dwelt among us, who with the courage of a prophet did not consider it unthinkable to delve in to "A Christian Approach to Communism", to point out to us that Dialectical Materialism and Christian philosophy, while occupying opposite ends of the spectrum, do come from the same source, namely Western Christendom.

That prophet, Mr. Baliozian, was none other than Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan of blessed memory. He knew well the "old testament" of modern atheism. He wrote "The theoretical content of Marxian criticism dished up as polemics against Christianity is the stale fare first presented by French Encyclopedist and later reshaped by Feurbach in his 'Essence of Christianity'."

As Leslie Dewart acknowledges in 1968, Abp. Nersoyan pointed out as far back as 1942, that the Marxian position was more of an anti-theist or anti-cleric nature "to free the proletariat from the influence of priests and reactionaries in order to secure their complete allegiance to themselves." "It is also probable" says Abp. Nersoyan "that Atheism may have had the additional attraction for them of being the most drastic way of eliminating the causes of disunion among the peoples of different religions and sects from which their ranks have been recruited". Abp. Nersoyan saw "the necessity of engaging Communism at its doctrinal fountain-head, Dialectical Materialism, the Dogmatics of Communism, of which Atheism is an integral part. It is a vast and consummate system and should be dealt with accordingly," he concluded.

His fear was, as it was during the Age of Enlightenment, that "religion will simply be ignored on account of its having been practically eliminated as a factor in the life of the people, and will be allowed to die its own natural death". The transition from Militant Atheist to simply atheist society, he said, "will obviously be deadlier for the Church". The challenge, he continues, "if allowed to stand and be combined with other destructive ideas, forebodes the relegation of the Church, lock, stock and barrel, into the museum of history, as an interesting antiquity, or to the obscure corners of eccentric gatherings".

Abp. Nersoyan, however, believed firmly "that even if the worst happens in the U.S.S.R., or for that matter anywhere else, a New Church will eventually begin to arise on the roots of the old one".

He went on to say "The Communist contention that religion itself is but a by-product of the economic forces, that it is simply a tool in the hands of ruling classes and that it will vanish with the establishment of the Classless Society, is to be disproved by history - the best valid disproof for a Communist".

As it can be seen, he sets the stage, or the battleground if you wish, wherein this "engagement" will have to take place and he does not have any illusion that we are entering into a sphere of sophomoric debate.

Abp. Nersoyan was not the type to sit back and watch the grass grow. He knew the enormity of the challenge. He said "Christianity does not admit Fatalism. And the Church must make the active effort to make history produce this disproof. Otherwise much labour spent and much value gained by the Church in the past to build up Her Tradition will have been lost in vain." He also knew what it takes to do all that. The Church, he said, "must . abandon conformism, and plunge into the deep Christian adventure" with a torch and a pail of water, if you will.

But that's not the way he suggested. "What is to be done?.... if anything, how is it to be done?" he asked and his answer was ..... "it is obviously tempting to shove the burden on to the shoulders of the Almighty, and wait for the Holy Spirit to shower His graces right and left". Not that he did not believe in God's mysterious ways, but he also believed that "the Church will have to harness Herself with a united effort for the hard



angelic struggle which lies ahead". He identified "two methods of advance for the conquest of modern unbelief. The first, he said, is that of an open attack on a wide front, by way of contrast and sharp opposition, white against black. He did not find this particular approach to have "any lasting usefulness". The second method, he maintained "is one of a bold understanding and sympathy, a sincere appreciation of what is good in the opponent's camp and the working out of a policy with a view of eventual reconciliation. This is essentially a Christian strategy" he concluded and hence probably is the title of the book, A Christian Approach to Communism: Ideological Similarities Between Dialectical Materialism and Christian Philosophy. The book was published by Frederick Muller Ltd. in Sept. 1942, W. & J. Mackay & CO., Ltd.

Such attempts at "integration" and "reconciliation" did not start, as we know, nor did they stop with Abp. Nersoyan. In more recent times theologians such as Tillich (Protestant), Teilhard de Chardin (Catholic) broke new grounds by taking what Kierkegaard called an existential "leap". The pendulum swung between rational investigation with aristocratic homage to philosophy, and admission of the impossibility of attaining complete rationality, with occasional surrender to the odd conviction that mystery and irrationality are marks of the divine.

These people theologians/philosophers tinkerers, one and all have placed milestones on the road to the ultimate reconciliation. They have been argued against, they have been negated, but they have not been dismissed with peripheral accusations and unwarranted indictments. These people, one and all, had the courage to say as Robert Kennedy did.... "why not?" or "what if?"

I do not know exactly where and when the advocates of "Liberation Theology" advanced their "social gospel". It is a fact that Latin America has never been the same since a number of mostly Catholic priests took the wind out of the Marxist claim for championing social and political and economic justice. The Church, not necessarily the hierarchy, the rank and file priests and laymen pushed the frontiers of the faith, coupled with social, political and economic agendas, right into the enemy's camp and, to all intents and purposes, they won.

This is where Abp. Nersoyan wanted the church to be, in the trenches. Yes, he can be

argued against, he can be negated in his arguments and assumptions. But he cannot be faulted in pushing spiritual warfare right into the enemy's camp. One would expect that even with a complete victory one would come out of such a life and death engagement wounded or at least soiled.

He did not know (no one did) the full magnitude of what was happening behind the "Iron Curtain". Even after knowing what we now do, one cannot argue against the cold "logic" of such a statement: "It is a Christian and universal principle that one man should die for many. Christ's death was the supreme example of this principle. Though on the one hand, Christ died of His own free will, on the other, He died in obedience to the will of the Father. His freedom consisted in His obedience. On the lower level, he continued, a man dies in obedience to the will of society, as expressed in the decision of the highest organ of that society, i.e., the State. Hence military conscription, and the patriotic duty of the soldier to be ready to die, irrespective of his opinion whether a war is to his individual liking or not." And here is the slammer: "it is also obvious that a man should not be left free to the detriment of society" concludes Abp. Nersoyan (the emphasis is mine). But not to be left with the impression that he was leaving all that authority in the hands of unscrupulous politicals, he adds "What is supremely important is that death (the individual's sacrifice for the whole) should be suffered only for salvation in the best sense of the word. That is the test of the whole cycle. Yet this test can only be made in the last resort by Divine Authority, or by Absolute Truth transcending society."

Regardless of who interprets this "universal principle" the chilling conclusion is inescapable. We do know that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Abp. Nersoyan maintains that "Only men believing in a true God can remedy the situation". Sorry, Srpazan, I find that difficult to accept as an assurance.

It is generally acknowledged that Marxist-Leninists raised their anti-theism to a sphere of quasi religion, and Abp. Nersoyan remarked that "its materialistic religion will not survive its achievements. It will then require a supra-temporal or spiritual realm of aspirations, which it will only be able to find by stepping gradually into a sphere lying beyond the limits of



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-No Mr. Baliozian, Abp. Nersoyan's book was never in the hands of "a substantial segment of the Armenian-American community and the Diaspora in general" as you state. I venture to say, not even a handful of people, clergy included, have seen, let alone read, the book to be influenced by it.

-No, Mr. Baliozian, it does matter to know that the publication of the book predates the division in the Armenian-American community by close to a decade. The Community was divided by the assassination of the then Primate Abp. Ghevont Tourian right in the church, right at the beginning of Holy Badarak. On another occasion, if my memory serves me right, you maligned his blessed memory too.

-No, Mr. Baliozian, you should not go unrepentant accusing the good Abp. Nersoyan for "identifying Christ with Stalin". He did no such thing. By the way, have you read the book yourself? I suggest you should! I will be very happy to mail you a copy.

-Yes, Mr. Baliozian, I agree with those who advise you (to whom you make occasional reference) that you should concentrate more on your literary activities than resort to a hit-and-run style, "Notes and Comments" with nuggets of half-truths and frequent provocations.

-Yes, Mr. Baliozian, I do value your translations and original works and I have actively promoted the distribution and the sale of these books. If I, too, sound patronizing, so be it!

Prayerfully yours,

Rev. Vertanes Kalayjian

#### CYRIL'S EXPOSITION

##### b. Cyril's Exposition.

Cyril, Ep. iv (Heurtley, *De Fide et Symbolo*, 182 sqq.).

[This 'Dogmatic Letter' (the 'Second letter to Nestorius'), Feb. 430, was read and approved at Ephesus and later at Chalcedon. The later letter with the anathemas (above) was not formally sanctioned at Chalcedon.]

... We do not [in saying that the Word 'was incarnate,' etc.] assert that there was any change in the nature of the Word when it became flesh, or that it was transformed into an entire man, consisting of soul and body; but we say that the Word, in a manner indescribable and inconceivable, united personally [*καὶ ὑποστάσις*] to himself flesh animated with a reasonable soul, and thus became man and was called the Son of man. And this was not by a mere act of will or favour, nor simply adopting a rôle [*εἰσέμμενος*, or taking to himself a person]. The natures which were brought together to form a true unity were different; but out of both is one Christ and one Son. We do not mean that the difference of the natures is annihilated by reason of this union; but rather that the Deity and Manhood, by their inexpressible and inexplicable concurrence into unity, have produced for us the one Lord and Son Jesus Christ. It is in this sense that he is said to have been born also after a woman's flesh, though he existed and was begotten from the Father before all ages. ... It was not that an ordinary man was first born of the holy Virgin, and that afterwards the Word descended upon him. He was united with the flesh in the womb itself, and thus is said to have undergone a birth after the flesh, inasmuch as he made his own the birth of his own flesh.

In the same way we say that he 'suffered and rose again.' We do not mean that God the Word suffered in his Deity ... for the Deity is impassible because it is incorporeal. But the body which had become his own body suffered these things, and therefore he himself is said to have suffered them for us. The impassible was in the body which suffered.

#### DIVINITY AND HUMANITY IN CHRIST

In the same way do we speak of his death. ...

Thus it is one Christ and Lord that we acknowledge, and as one and the same we worship him, not as a man with the addition of the Word ... because the body of the Lord is not alien from the Lord; and it is with this body that he sits at the Father's right hand. ...

We must not then separate the one Lord Christ into two Sons. Some who do this make a show of acknowledging a union of persons; but this does not avail to restore their doctrine to soundness. For Scripture does not say 'the Word united to himself the person of a man,' but 'the Word was made flesh.' And that means precisely this, that he became partaker of flesh and blood, just as we do, and made our body his own. He was born of a woman; but he did not cast aside his being God and his having been begotten of God the Father. He assumed our flesh; but he continued to be what he was. ...



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