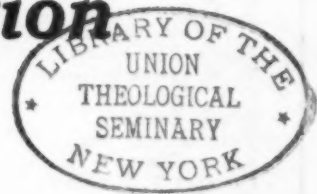


The
**CHRISTIAN
CENTURY**

A Journal of Religion



Christianity and Communism

By Hugh Vernon White

The Laymen's Mission
Report

By Pearl S. Buck

11/15
11/17

The Future of Norman Thomas
Mr. Roosevelt's Free Hand

Editorials

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The CHRISTIAN CENTURY

November 23, 1932

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The Office Notebook

The article by Mrs. Buck on the report of the Laymen's Foreign Mission inquiry is only a beginning. Letters and cablegrams are now circling the earth to invite others with differing points of view to comment on this history-making document.

One of the next of these comments, the Notebook is informed, will be by George E. Sokolsky. And that should mean as fresh and incisive a treatment as the current one by Mrs. Buck. Mr. Sokolsky is, as most readers of *The Christian Century* know, the adviser of the *New York Times* on far eastern affairs. He has been at the very center of the situation in the orient since the close of the world war. His book on "The Tinder-box of Asia" is today's best seller on the Manchurian issue. As one who sees the orient from the standpoint of a political observer and writer, and is not himself a Christian, Mr. Sokolsky's observations on the Laymen's inquiry will have unique interest.

The *Christian Century's* ceaseless battle to keep its pages from looking too much like advertisements by holding the use of capital letters to a minimum has long since been accepted by most of the sticklers for the good old rules as a harmless idiosyncrasy that, being beyond healing, might as well be accepted. But there remain some irreconcilables. One of them wrote this week from Columbia, South Carolina:

To Whoever Manages the Capitalization in the Office of the christian century:

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am moved to say that much as I enjoy reading your esteemed periodical, sometimes, it gives me a deep pain in the neck to see the residence of the President of the United States referred to as the "white house." If ever there was a particularly unique proper noun referring to only one place in the universe it is the "White House." You might as well refer to the library of congress, the smithsonian institute, the corcoran art gallery, or to washington itself without capitals. It is not a white house but *the* White House, designed and dedicated to the one sole purpose of housing the family of the President of the United States.

Every time I see these words so printed I wonder whether the Century has a particular dislike for that building, or whether the idea is to add a little tax on the ingenuity of the reader to discover what white house is referred to.

george n. Edwards.

P. S. If my capitalization is defective it is due to the constant reading of the *Christian century*.

Contributors to This Issue

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The CHRISTIAN CENTURY

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EDITORIAL

THE CHURCH FEDERATION of Brooklyn has asked people of all faiths in that borough to pledge themselves to eat only "simple and inexpensive" meals on Thanksgiving, and to give the difference between the cost of such meals and that of the traditional variety of holiday dinner to the poor. It is to be hoped that this appeal will be echoed, and heeded, throughout the country. Religion faces no more immediate test at this moment than the conduct of its professed adherents in the face of appalling human need. Cutting down on overeating next Thursday will not fill the treasuries of our various relief organizations. But if the plea of the Brooklyn federation should be generally heeded the amount thus made available for relief would be far from negligible. If there are church members who do insist on gorging themselves, while making no commensurate gift to the funds which are struggling to save their fellow-citizens from starvation, we trust that their spiritual advisers will find some means of forcing upon their attention those ancient words: "Whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?"

Simple Meals for Thanksgiving

The League and the Lytton Report

UNDER the terms of reference, the council of the League of Nations must take up consideration of the Lytton report on Manchuria not later than November 21. Since any further postponement will increase that skepticism on the part of the small nations to which Mr. de Valera made such pointed allusion in his speech as president of the assembly, it looks as though the league has at last reached the point at which it will have to come to terms with this famous, and trouble-fraught, document. A few days additional delay may be gained while the council

reads the objections to the report which Japan is expected to file. But not later than the first of next month the report will be passed along to the special committee of nineteen which the assembly formed to deal with the whole issue of Chino-Japanese relations at the time, last February, when the attack on Shanghai moved China to appeal to article 15 of the covenant. With the official arrival of the report in the hands of the special committee, the nations will have to make a choice that may make or break the league. What will the assembly—which can be counted on to approve the recommendations of the special committee—do? It is likely, of course, to begin by adopting some sort of resolution in which Japan and China are called on to accept the recommendations of the report. At the very least, the two nations will be asked to begin negotiations, perhaps under some sort of league auspices, looking toward such acceptance. It is not certain that China will accept such a recommendation, because of considerations of sovereignty involved in the Lytton proposals for an autonomous Manchuria. But leaving China aside for the moment, as the less likely intransigent, suppose Japan refuses. What then? Then the league will be faced with the question of passing a formal verdict on Japan's alleged violation of its international obligations, to be followed, in case of a vote of guilty, by consideration of the penalty to be imposed. That penalty would certainly include a formal adoption of the policy of non-recognition of the Manchukuo regime already announced by the United States; it might extend to serious economic measures, and perhaps even the expulsion of Japan from the league.

The Lytton Report—Test And Promise

NATURALLY, the powers represented on the council of the league will not wish to see matters in the far east pushed to a point where a break

The Laymen's Mission Report

By Pearl S. Buck

I MUST FRANKLY confess to a considerable amount of prejudice when I took up this report, which in extent and scope of survey and in length is a large book.* This prejudice was founded in certain recollections of the Laymen's inquiry group as well as in certain inherent doubts of their whole project. Among the first of the commission sent to China, where I happened to meet them, were not a few men, it seemed to me, of rather small caliber. It is only fair to say that this criticism could certainly not be made of the group who came later to appraise the findings of the first group. With almost no exception these seemed to me to be men and women of extraordinary sympathy and keen intelligence.

But my prejudice was based on something more than a few personalities in a certain group. We missionaries find ourselves now in the position of being one of the most criticized bodies in the world, and it is not, I think, wholly because we are mediocre men and women, but more because our cause has lost its old appeal, and we are made the scapegoats by those who no longer wish to give to it. We have become, if not hardened to, at least accustomed to groups of persons, commissions and secretaries from boards and traveling Americans of various kinds, who come to tell us what is wrong with us. Those of us who have a sense of humor and some humility bear it as best we can.

Unintelligent Criticism

I remember quite clearly thinking when the Laymen's inquiry commission came that here was another one of them, of which we had already too many. Nor was my prejudice wholly prejudice. While I realize very well the great value of objective study and suggestion from those detached from a piece of work, yet many who have come to study and criticize missions more or less adequately have been men who were not themselves sufficiently trained or intelligent to understand the conditions of the countries they visited. More often than not, they were men of a type inclined to measure the missionary and his work by various mechanical results, such as the number of church members, the financial success of the enterprise—in other words, they demanded concrete proof of "what the missionary has to show for it." My own deep sympathy with missionaries, irrespective of whether or not I can agree with or approve of the way they worked, has made me resent these unintelligent critics with real heat.

With accumulated feelings of this sort, therefore, I took up the report of the Laymen's foreign mission inquiry. I now confess with enthusiasm and delight that having read it from cover to cover, I put it down

with a sense of complete satisfaction. I have not read merely a report. I have read a unique book, a great book. The book presents a masterly statement of religion in its place in life, and of Christianity in its place in religion. The first three chapters are the finest exposition of religion I have ever read. The later chapters present a true and perfect picture of missions, and last of all are a series of constructive plans for the reorganization of Christian missions, which if followed must result in a great new impetus not only to missions but to the life of the church in America.

A Masterpiece of Constructive Thought

The foundation of the whole book, the cornerstone of the temple, is in the first chapter where it is said, "That missions should go on, with whatever changes, we regard as beyond serious question." Upon this is built a masterpiece of constructive religious thought, expressed in a simple style so beautiful as to make of this report a literary work and one filled with a spirit which to me is nothing less than inspired.

Those of us who feared need fear no more. There is here an understanding of the missionary and a sympathy which astonishes me, and there is at the same time a fearless appraisal of him and of his work which cannot but be helpful to the Christian cause throughout the world.

I think this is the only book I have ever read which seems to me literally true in its every observation and right in its every conclusion. Naturally, therefore, I cannot review it critically. It expresses too perfectly all that I have known and felt about Christianity in general and missions in particular. I can only rejoice that what seems to me complete truth has been thus made known. I am more encouraged about missions now and about the Christian religion than I have ever been in my life. I want every American Christian to read this book. I hope it will be translated into every language. If Christians take this book seriously at all, I foresee possibly the greatest missionary impetus that we have known in centuries. What do I not see—what possibilities for showing forth Christ, at last as he truly is, to the world!

The Coming of the New Missionary

My mind leaps ahead to the new missionary which must come out of the new purposes which will be the fruit of this book. I have the greatest love and appreciation of the missionary as he has been and as he is now. I deplore the superficial criticism that he is mediocre; it is unfair to him. Mediocrity is a matter of comparison, and the criticism can only be made of the missionary fairly when it is supported by the reasons for his limitations. The truth is, the missionary of the past and of the present is a man above the average in his own home surroundings. The average

*The Report of the Appraisal Commission of the Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry is being published under the title, "Re-Thinking Missions," by Harper and Brothers, \$2.00.

missionary minister, like the average missionary doctor and teacher, is above others of his own kind, I believe, in America. He more than represents the groups who send him abroad. Indeed, he is the fruit of the Christian church in America. If he is limited in outlook it is because American Christians are limited in outlook; if he is lacking in appreciation and understanding of the culture of the country to which he goes, and particularly of religions other than his own, it is because those who send him are so also. Yet it is also perfectly true that the missionary is not a big enough man for his situation. I used to blame him for this until I came to America and saw the people who sent him and then I knew that I was demanding a well-nigh impossible product from such a source. Where the missionary is mediocre, therefore, it is because the group who sends him is mediocre.

In addition, the organization of the mission, from the boards to the local station in the foreign field, is an intolerable weight upon the missionary and a crushing weight upon any person of sensitivity. We missionaries have been made to feel that we are judged by numbers of converts and by the accuracy and economy with which we spent the board's money. It has made us of necessity men and women of limited outlook. We are money-minded. Instead of doing our real work we spend hours of our precious time discussing infinitesimal items on budgets. Every station meeting is filled, not with constructive thought on forward policies, but with anxious arguments as to whether we can add a dollar a month to a local teacher's salary, or whether we can spend ten dollars on repairs in some chapel.

Influence of Board Control

Some of us rebel, and I am frankly one of these, for I will not spend my time in this way, nor will I put any creative thought upon such subjects. Yet I know perfectly well that while I may have solved my personal problem by simply saying "I will not," I have not solved anything in reality, for the fact remains that someone must do it, for it is demanded of us. Some more patient soul in the station than mine works the longer over the dreary task because I will not. I protest, therefore, against the enormous and cruel organization which now puts the missionary into the place of an employe who must account for the penny of money and the moment of time. Of course we are men and women of limited outlook! In heaven's own name, what else could we be? The rules of the Mission Manual assume an importance greater than any rule Christ ever gave. We are time punchers, frightened lest we do not please—not God, but the board or our supporting constituency. It is a spiritual slavery degrading beyond words.

And the weapon held over us is often the crudest and most effective, the wretched little salary on which we and our children must depend. We live in a state of fear which is often times not expressed, or bravely covered with the words that we will trust in God, who will provide for our children somehow. Appar-

ently he does not so provide, for in these later years the salaries have been dwindling and fear becomes terror. Of course we are money-minded. We cannot but be money-minded. We are told continually that we must do all we can to raise funds; we are continually frightened lest we do or say or write something which may result in a loss of funds to the board. Money has come to obscure our whole sun.

Boards Not to Blame

Now I do not for a moment propose to lay the blame for this hideous situation upon the mission boards. These boards are simply public servants, faithful, honest and usually uninspired public servants. They have done what has been demanded of them; they have tried to render honest account. The trouble is not with them. It is further back somewhere.

I remember when the first members of this Laymen's inquiry commission came to China I made an earnest case to some of them that they give the missionary a fair chance. I said, "You American Christians are making an impossible demand upon your missionaries. You send a missionary young and untrained into an immense foreign country like China, with a completely new language to learn, new conditions of living, a vast history, a different culture, and you give him two years. After that he is expected to produce converts. If he does not you question his efficiency. He is nervous lest he fail, and he puts his emphasis into hasty and mistaken efforts of propaganda with the hope of numbers to show for the pitifully small sums you have spent upon him. Two years in which to learn about four thousand years! Two years even in which to learn to speak enough to present the Christian faith! Do you know what I should like? I should like you to send out fewer missionaries, far fewer, but men and women in whom you have confidence and whose ability you know. Let those men and women go into carefully chosen communities and simply live there for ten years doing the work for which they are specifically trained. Ask no questions as to what the missionary is doing. Give him as his only instruction that he is to live as nearly as possible as he thinks Christ would live in that community. At the end of ten years send your best representative there and see how he is liked in that community. Do not ask if he has made a single church member. What does that matter? Church organization if it is sound can only come as one of the fruits of the wish of a group to be so organized for fellowship. If he has gathered a group about him who wish to be so organized, it is well enough, but not essential at all. Let the sole question about that missionary be whether or not he is beloved in the community, whether the people see any use in his being among them, whether or not the way he has lived there has conveyed anything to the people about Christ—not, mind you, whether or not he has preached, for that is of no value, but whether by the way he has lived he has conveyed anything. If he has not, then let him be returned to his own country."

When I put forth this idea the member replied, "I do not believe that the boards or the American church would stand for such missionary work. We must see more actual results."

Would the Churches Stand for It?

I said no more, but my heart sank. He also could not see that the poor lists of church members, the things he called results, were less than worthless. Is it to be wondered at that missionaries are men and women of limited outlook? Here is a significant fact: almost every missionary who has achieved distinction in appreciation and understanding of a culture which he was sent to Christianize, and who has expressed that appreciation and understanding, has been forced to leave missionary ranks. There are many great names of scholars of international reputation who were once missionaries, but who because they sought to teach Christianity in a tolerant and sensitive way were compelled to sever themselves from missions. If they have not yet severed themselves, feeling as many of them do the enormous value of the Christian spirit in the world, and desiring to identify themselves with Christians even though they are groups of narrow and limited persons, yet these also have been warned that they are departing from the rules of the organization. I had been sinking into a sort of despair about missions being a possible field for any spirit of profound religious feeling or keen intelligence or creative ability. I have hope again now that I have read this book.

The crux of the whole thing is here. We must realize, we Christians, that we have not even begun our work in foreign lands. A great many Christians have asked me why in "The Good Earth" I did not make Wang Lung become a Christian. My reply is, "If you want to write about an isolated case as I did in 'The Young Revolutionist' you could do so. But in 'The Good Earth' I was writing about average people in China. I do not believe that Christianity has touched the average man and woman any more than I made it appear in that book—as words seen and not understood."

Christ has not become a part of the Chinese life, at least. We have not grafted him upon the root of that old civilization. Let us not deceive ourselves. We can have no assurance that if we withdrew from China today there would be any more permanent record left of our presence there these hundred and fifty years than there is left of the old Nestorian church, a windblown, obliterated tablet upon a desert land.

Rice Christians

There are many reasons for this, but the real reason has been that we Christians of the west have not become a part of the country to which we have gone. We have gone as a group of professional Christians, paid by an organization foreign to the country. We have been hopelessly handicapped by our professionalism, just as the average minister is handicapped

anywhere. We have further handicapped Chinese Christians and churches by paying them foreign money. We have fastened upon them and upon ourselves the stigma of rice Christians, although there are many to whom it is unjustly applied. But there is so much truth in it that it must be a primary consideration in any appraisal of Christian groups.

Again I refuse to let the whole blame rest upon the missionary. He is forced often into situations by his supporting constituency. I recall an instance, easily multiplied, of a certain small interior station in China in a famine ridden and poverty stricken district. There the people live in earthen houses, and even the houses of the richer families are humble. There is no large building in the city. But the mission work in this place was supported by a wealthy and fashionable New York church, which wanted these visible results which have been such a curse to missions. They gave the money with enthusiasm for an enormous and expensive church building, to be built in a hybridized temple style, in this simple country town. There the church stands today, a monument to absurdity. It is so expensive that the Christians cannot even pay repairs on it. The missionaries expostulated at the time and were almost unanimously against the building of the church. Some of us were even violently opposed to it. But it was built and stands there now, and the people of that city have been robbed of an inestimable privilege, the privilege of building their own temple to the living God. It would have been of earth, perhaps, or a simple brick structure such as the Confucian temple there is, and there would have been no upturned corners and no carvings and colors. But it would have been their own and they could have worshiped there.

What's to Be Done?

What then is to be done now about Christian missions? This report of the Laymen's commission has outlined excellently the new organization which it believes might be effective, and in which I thoroughly concur. But I should like to add a further suggestion of the new type of work we might try. This does not mean that we should instantly drop all existing institutions and individuals. I have seen enough of revolutions to know they accomplish nothing. After the noise and the tumult are over the building must begin just as though the tumult and noise had never been. Revolution, so far as I have seen it, has been waste, and simply emotional release. Rather let the new work begin concurrently with carrying on what seems best of the existing types of work. Briefly the new work would be of this nature:

Let the mission organization of the future realize that the basic lack of success in spreading the spirit of Christianity has been because neither the messenger nor the message has been suited to the needs of the people. We have never considered the people. It seems an inexcusable oversight, when we consider that the first thing Christ always did was to under-

stand the man who stood before him and perform that act and speak those words which suited his particular need. With that simple basis, I should like to see the missionary sent to satisfy a special need of a community—not the artificial need of a mission station for a clerical man or a woman evangelist or what not, but a real need of the people. It might be a specialist in some government college, it might be a technical expert in mining or agriculture, it might be a research worker, it might be a nurse in a Chinese hospital, or a doctor trained in some aspects of disease who might pass on his knowledge to others. It might be a recreation expert. Whatever it was, it should be a certain and adequate supply to a known and expressed need in a certain group.

When the Missionary Is Wanted

I mean, I should want that group to know it needed that particular man or woman. The group should be willing to pay him, so that the mission organization would not pay the missionary's salary. In the present uncertainty of the times the mission organization should, however, stand behind the missionary, ready to help him temporarily so that his work might continue as long as needed. My own personal experience in such situations, which has been in government universities, is that those organizations make every struggle to pay the foreign professors whom they value.

My own belief is that the missionary who becomes part of the native life and organization will often prefer to suffer exigency with the other members of the group rather than take special benefit. But at the same time for the sake of his children and those dependent on him, he should have a sort of insurance in case of extreme need if he wishes to avail himself of it. But he would have no more subsidy for his work than the organization under whom he worked could give him. In such a situation it would be part of his opportunity to do the best with what they had and at the same time to help within the organization by such means as were there to provide for more effective labor, particularly in scientific and technical lines. He would, in short, be a part of a native work, throwing his life into it as it was and working through it as one of its members. Preaching would be his last task. His life would be to mark the difference between a Christian professor or technician and the non-Christian solely in the honesty and sincerity and efficiency and devotion with which he did his work and lived in the group. There is often a difference, but it has too seldom been shown.

Highly Trained Workers Imperative

Of course such a form of missionary work presupposes a thorough knowledge of the field and a constant watchfulness for openings for such service. It presupposes also a highly trained type of person. Many times this person may be one of our own best experts in a special line, sent for a longer or shorter period to help in a particular need. But nothing is

truer in this whole report of the Laymen's inquiry than the statement that we need as the missionaries of the future highly trained men and women who are masters in some particular knowledge. Better six such persons than a hundred of the average missionaries; nay, rather better one such than any number of others.

Life Rather than Preaching

But above all, let the spread of the spirit of Christ be rather by mode of life than preaching. I am weary unto death with this incessant preaching. It deadens all thought, it confuses all issues, it is producing in our Chinese church a horde of hypocrites and in our theological seminaries a body of Chinese ministers which makes one despair for the future. Let us cease our talk for a time and cut off our talkers, and try to express our religion in terms of living service, so that we may show others and see for ourselves if our religion is worth anything or not.

I am perfectly aware that here some reader will say solemnly, "But you must not forget that the seed is the word."

And who shall say that by the word we must mean nothing but talk? What people ever understood what the word meant until it was made into flesh and dwelt among them? Only then do any of us behold its glory, the glory as of God full of grace and truth.

I take hope, therefore, for the future of our religion and for its permeation into the hearts of men everywhere. If there is a body of men like these, who can produce a work like this book, who have this spirit in them, then Christ is not dead but living. If the Christians of America will take this book and read it and proceed upon it, I believe it will stand in the future as a great monument, dividing the dying past from a glorious new movement in Christian life.

Just Work

SCION—And this is the picture of the man who laid the foundation of our family fortune. Long, long ago.

FRIEND—I see.

SCION—It used to hang in a more conspicuous place, in the center of that wall. But we put it over here. I guess you understand.

FRIEND—Strong face.

SCION—Yes; rather coarse. I should think the artist could have softened the lines. And those hands.

FRIEND—Like a worker's hands.

SCION—Poor fellow. What did he have of life? Just work.

FRIEND—Just work. Poor fellow.

SCION—What was that? Somebody laughed. Did you hear it?

FRIEND—It seemed to come from that picture.

SCION—From the picture? Can it be possible? Is the old man laughing at us?

ARTHUR B. RHINOW.