Articles by Arthur G. Clarke

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More China News (Feb 1960)

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The “back to the land,” movement was introduced not only to increase agricultural production but to provide more employment for the many workless of the cities, reduce beggary and in order to draw the literate classes and the peasants together. Even university graduates must spend at least a year at farm work or some other form of manual labour, while undergraduates spend a weekend each month in a similar way. The slightest complaint is liable to the discipline of banishment to some harder task in the interior until the offender is cured of his “independent,” views. In such conditions of life it is not surprising that suicides are common.

Actually the experiment with communes has not proved the success hoped for. The system is profoundly hated by the people, many of whom in sheer desperation have been driven to open opposition. Then famines and food shortages caused mainly by the boosting of agricultural exports have seriously disrupted the programme in several regions. Strict rationing was introduced into the cities including Shanghai where not a few commodities formerly common are now no longer obtainable. In the Spring of this year the meat ration there was down to two ounces in ten days, with a monthly allowance of 8 oz. fish, 12 oz. edible oil and 4 oz. of sugar. For clothing 21 ft. a narrow cotton cloth is the year’s supply for each. In the shops no eggs are to be bought, no fruit except now and then a few spotted apples, and very few fresh vegetables. Occasionally one may be able to get a cooked dish. Arabian dates and sugar cane are sold for

cake-making! In consequence of these difficulties, the Red Government has been compelled to close down a number of communal centres and modify the procedure at others.

It has long been known that Cummunism is militantly atheistic. Its leaders oplenly declare a determination to wipe out Christianity, which they see as the chief rival on their horizon. During the past year or so the real aim of the Red Governments of China and North Korea has become plain to the outside world. This is the complete immobilisation of the Christian Church rendering it wholly ineffective as an influence in Chinese and Korean society. The only purpose of its continuance is to be a leading propaganda agency for the Communist regime. It was so used in the Korean war. When the Communist armies first overran the provinces of China after the Second World War the new government made extravagant promises of “deliverance” for the people including religious liberty. It was soon found, however, that the Reds’ concept of freedom differed greatly from Western standards. Actually there is more religious freedom in Russia today than in Red China.

Soon after coming into power the Communists established a Bureau of Religious Affairs, which, working through the already existing Three Self Patriotic Movement was to line up all the Protestant churches behind official policies. There Self means self-government, self-supporting and self-propagating, exempary aims when rightly understood, but in the Comunist interpretation involves Government control over the whole Movement.

Further News from China (Mar 1960)

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A willing and capable leader was found in Mr. Y. T. Wu, a Communist sympathiser and former secretary of the Chinese Y.M.C.A. Though professing Christianity and prominent in certain church circles, Mr. Wu and his friends had long held and propagated advanced modernistic views, denying almost all fundamental truth concerning the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. These men from the very first advocated the allegiance of Christians to the Communist Party, declaring that without this Party's support the cleansing of the Church from the "destructive poisons of imperialist and anti-socialist thinking," could not be effected.

The stages by which the Communists have secured a stranglehold on the Christian Church in China can now be perceived by all who have closely followed the sequence of events. The stages are four, and have been pursued with all the subtlety and thoroughness so characteristic of all Communist action.

The FIRST STAGE began with the publication in the year 1950 of a Manifesto drawn up by members of the Red Government with the cooperation of a group of Church leaders sponsored by Mr. Wu. This document commited the Church to a purging of itself from what they termed "imperialism", meaning foreign missionary enterprise, and called upon all Church members to render their highest loyalty not to God and His Church but to the State, and to give unquestioning obedience to Party dictates.

Following publication of this Manifesto, pressure was brought to bear upon all the churches to achieve immediate self-support and self-government. A few prominent evangelicals were deceived by the specious promises of the authorities, and joined the movement looking towards a united Church. Their names were widely published for their propaganda value in overcoming resistance in evangelical groups. Later, when protests were made against innovations of which they disapproved, these men were promptly dismissed and their places taken by nominees of the Three Self Committee. The proclaimed objective was the expulsion of all the foreign missionaries and the seizure of all mission property which was to be handed over to the Three Self Organisation. Before eventual expulsion, many missionaries were arrested and imprisoned on false charges of plotting against the regime. They suffered the diabolical “brain-washing” treatment, concerning which much has been written. The last three brethren from home assemblies to be so maltreated before eventual release were Mr. John McGehee of U.S.A., from Britain, Mr. Arnold J. Clarke (son of the present writer) now serving the Lord in Western Thailand, and Mr. Geoffrey Bull, who has recently gone out to British North Borneo. The first stage was virtually completed by the end of 1951, although the release of several imprisoned missionaries did not take place until much later.

The SECOND STAGE was characterised by an intensive inquiry into church memberships to discover opponents of the new order and to intimidate them into acquiescence. “Accusation Meetings” were enforced and at these many ministers were accused of “pro-

imperialist” sympathies. Such were publically denounced, which usually meant immediate dismissal from their churches and not infrequently imprisonment or banishment to a labour camp. Several well-known preachers were victims of this persecution. Some were even condemned for holding services in private homes in an endeavour to maintain a healthy Christian testimony. Others suffered because they preached the Second Coming of Christ! “Self-accusation classes” were also compulsory at which many exposed themselves to severe “brain-washing” treatment.

The apparent object of all this was the suppression of “free lance” evangelism and underground activities by Christians. It was during this period (1951 to 1956) that a number of leading evangelicals took a strong stand in countering the Three Self Committee’s propaganda that had been directed against foreign missionary enterprise. They showed that this had been misrepresented in every possible way and that what was denounced as “imperialist poison” was in fact the foundational truth of the Christian faith. Soon these courageous brethren, too, were called upon to suffer the penalties inflicted upon all who dared to oppose the Committee.

More News from China (Apr 1960)

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Years before the last war China saw the gradual emergence of groups of believers who formed independent, indigenous churches functioning more or less after the New Testament pattern. These, with assemblies planted by missionaries from home assemblies, for the most part held aloof from the "National Church" movement. At first they were ignored as an insignificant minority, but during this second stage they began to come under the ban of the Communists. A number of well-esteemed brethren were arrested, tried and imprisoned, and like so many others endured the "brain-washing" technique to the ruin oft-times of both physical and mental health.

The THIRD STAGE developed during the closing days of 1957 and the earlier part of 1958. Confident that the nation was now under effective control, the Communist Party Chairman, Mr. Mao Tzi-tung, proclaimed greater freedom of speech and press, and even invited criticism of Government policies, meaning, of course, constructive criticism! He and the rest of China's rulers were greatly shocked at the outburst of attacks upon those policies that followed. No doubt unwisely some Christian leaders were outspoken in pointing out failures in the administration. This could not be tolerated! A campaign to rectify such "wrong thinking" was immediately ordered. While the whole populace was affected, again it was the Church that came under special scrutiny through the agency of the Three Self Organisation. Hundreds of ministers were denounced as "rightists and

anti-revolutionists” and had their licences to preach revoked. Many were banished to labour camps in distant provinces.

Others were either executed or driven to suicide.

The FOURTH STAGE began in August 1958 with a drastic reduction in the number of churches and the dismissal of many more ministers. In most towns and cities places of congregation for Christians were brought down to two or three. In the populous city of Shanghai the churches were reduced from two hundred to about twenty and in Peking, the capital, from fifty to four.

Redundant pastors were sent to work in the communes, which were by this time in full swing in all the rural areas. As far back as the 1950 Conference with Church leaders, Premier Chou En-Lai had strongly advocated a merger of all the various denominations with the shrewd remark that even the Bible taught Christian unity. With the customary thoroughness the plan was now carried out. All matters of doctrine or differing Church order were subordinated to the requirements of unity and uniformity. One hymnbook only was to be used and one form of service with a single organization in control. All pastors were to be only those duly authorised by the Bureau of Religious Affairs, those who were prepared to conform to the directives of the authorities, and who had undergone periods of indoctrination lasting sometimes for months. Sermons were to be on themes chosen by the Three Self Committee and mainly of a political nature.

Evangelical teaching was forbidden, being considered subversive of good social order. Such subjects as the

vanity of this present world, eternal life, Christ’s return to set up His kingdom on earth, sin, Christian separation from the world are now all subjects to be studiously avoided.