

## For a New Society

Church of England liberals moved boldly last week to seize for the Church leadership in "ordering the new society" which they found "quite evidently emerging" from the war.

To that end they stole a march on the Government with a program of post-war aims which, coming from any group, would be startling. Coming from the traditionally complacent and conservative Established Church it was little short of revolutionary. It called for unification of Europe in a cooperative commonwealth, communal ownership of the means of production, more religion and less liturgy. On the negative side it condemned the profit motive and the Church's own financial dependence on ancient perquisites and levies.

Virtually unanimous sponsors of this program are the Archbishop of York, 23 of the Church's 98 bishops (including top-ranking London and Durham), 14 deans and a total of some 200 other churchmen. All of them seemingly remembered that the great ages of Christianity have come when the Church took the lead in historic movements, which were as much economic and social as religious, like the Crusades and the Reformation. All of them were determined that the Church should assume just such a leadership in post-war reconstruction. And all of them were determined that that leadership should come from the Liberal rather than the Conservative wing.

With greatcoats wrapped around them, they gathered day after day in the paralyzing cold of unheated Malvern College to hear speaker after speaker denounce present-day failure to identify Christianity with any great cause except "nosing out fornication." And then without a single dissenting voice they adopted a resolution presented by the Archbishop himself. Chief planks:

**Union Then.** "After the war our aim must be the unification of Europe as a cooperative commonwealth."

**Commerce and Conservation.** "In international trade a genuine interchange of materially needed commodities must take the place of a struggle for so-called favorable balance. . . . We must recover reverence for the earth and its resources, treating it no longer as a reservoir of potential wealth to be exploited, but as a storehouse of divine bounty on which we utterly depend."

**Profit System Condemned.** "Christians doctrine must insist that production exists for consumption. . . . To a large extent production is carried on not to supply the consumer with goods but to bring profits to the producer. . . . This method . . . which tends to treat human work and human satisfaction alike as a means to a false end—namely monetary gain—becomes the source of unemployment at home and dangerous competition for markets abroad. . . . The monetary system must be so administered that what the



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*" . . . to bring before uninstructed people the truth concerning God."*

community can produce is made available to the members of the community, the satisfaction of human needs being accepted as the only true end of production."

**Labor.** "The true status of man independent of economic progress must find expression in the managerial framework of industry; the rights of labor must be recognized as in principle equal to those of capital in the control of industry, whatever the means by which this transformation is effected."

To this unanimous resolution the conference added "by a very large majority" a still more sweeping amendment proposed by Liberal M. P. Sir Richard Thomas Acland, which stirred up the only major controversy in the four-day conference. This amendment asserted that "the ownership of the great resources of our community . . . [by] private individuals is a stumbling block. . . . The time has come, therefore, for Christians to proclaim the need for seeking some form of society in which this stumbling block will be removed."

Hardly less revolutionary than the Church's program for society was its program for reforming itself:

**Church's Function.** "The Church has the duty and the right to speak, not only to its members but to the world, concerning the true principles of human life. . . . The Church, as we know it, does not. . . . We, therefore, urge that enterprises be

initiated whereby that life can be made manifest."

**Church Militant.** "Christian people should take the fullest possible share in public life, both in Parliament, in municipal councils, in trade unions, and all other bodies affecting the public welfare."

**Church Finances.** "Christians, clergy and laity alike, cannot take part in this work unless they are prepared to advocate complete reorganization of the internal financial life of the Church."

**Form of Worship.** "This must be so directed and conducted that its relevance to life and to men's actual needs is evident. . . . Our traditional forms of matins and evensong, presupposing as they do acceptance of the tradition of the Church and unfailing regularity of use, are largely unsuitable. They must in most places be supplemented by services of another type, whether liturgical or not; designed to bring before uninstructed people the truth concerning God."

**Concrete Christian Service** "The whole congregation habitually worshipping together should regularly meet to plan and carry out some common enterprise for the general good; if there are social evils in a locality, such as bad housing or malnutrition, let them consider how evil can be remedied. . . . In other places let 'cells' be formed upon the basis of common prayer, study and service."

A far cry is all this from the class con-


sciousness of the Church of England (and U. S. Episcopal) Catechism: "My duty . . . 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." But World War II has merely speeded the shift from the oldtime hunting-parson philosophy. Forerunners of the change were the Bishop of Ely's effort in 1939 to turn his palace into an old folk's home ("we keep too many gardeners to grow too many vegetables to feed too many servants to make too many beds"); the 1937 move by a group of bishops and clergy to give up the mining royalties of the poverty-stricken northeast of England which went to the Church, because otherwise it "cannot hope to evangelize successfully a body of men [miners] who are strongly prejudiced against the sources of its supply."

If the Malvern resolutions were revolutionary, the speeches which spurred the conference to their acceptance were no less so. Seldom has the Church called sinners to repentance with such bitter jeremiads as those by which ten lay speakers called the Church itself to repentance. Gloomed Critic-Philosopher John Middleton Murry: "The Church has no relevant pattern of goodness to set before contemporary man. . . . Regarding unemployment has the Church done any other than acquiesce in the appalling solution which is the only one secular society has found, namely, preparation for war? . . . The Church fails in leadership because it shows no signs of having known despair; no evidence of having been terrified by its own impotence."

Poet T(homas) S(tearns) Eliot attacked the Church in wasteland accents for letting Christian principle vanish from education. Sir Richard Acland was fiercer: "For over 150 years you have neglected your duty . . . because of sheer funk. . . . The whole structure of society . . . is, from the Christian point of view, rotten and must permanently frustrate your efforts to create for the individual the possibility of a Christian life. . . . This has given Hitler the opportunity for saying 'To hell with the whole order.' . . . He said this, and from despairing humanity he wrung forth a tremendous and dynamic response. . . . In order to save humanity from the horror of . . . Naziism, we must find a way of living superior, not merely to Naziism, but to that which we ourselves knew before. . . . We are unprepared for this. . . . You must be prepared to offend people who are determined to preserve the existing order. . . . I beg of you now to proclaim the new society openly. . . . So only will you save yourselves and us."

Novelist Dorothy Leigh Sayers ("Lord Peter Wimsey") was even more vitriolic. "Suppose," said she, "that during the last century the churches had . . . denounced cheating with a quarter of the vehemence with which they denounced legalized adultery [i.e., divorce and remarriage]. But one was easy and the other was not. . . . To upset legalized cheating, the church must tackle the Government in its very stronghold; while to cope with intellectual corruption she will have to affront all

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those who exploit it—the politician, the press, and the more influential part of her own congregations. Therefore, she will acquiesce in a definition of morality so one-sided that it has deformed the very meaning of the word to sexual offences. And yet, if every man living were to sleep in his neighbor's bed, it could not bring the world so near shipwreck as that pride, that avarice and that intellectual sloth which the church has forgotten to write in the tale of its capital sins."

No small part of the significance of the conference was that its convener and chairman was the Church of England's second ranking prelate and its real intellectual and spiritual leader—stout, brisk, erudite, 59-year-old Dr. William Temple, Archbishop of York. Son of an Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Temple was an Oxford don of philosophy at 23, a headmaster at 29, a bishop at 39, an archbishop at 47. A famed theologian and an ardent exponent of the ecumenical (inter-church) movement, he is likely to be first president of the still-organizing World Council of Churches. Said he at the conference:

"The war is not to be regarded as an isolated evil detached from the general condition of western civilization. . . . It is one symptom of widespread disease and maladjustment, resulting from the loss of conviction concerning the reality and character of God. . . . [We need] a new order of society—a new integration of religion, morals, politics and economics. . . . 'It is the business of Lambeth [the palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury] to remind Westminster [the houses of Parliament] of its responsibility to God.'"

Conspicuously absent from the Malvern Conference was the suave, sail-trimming Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend and Right Honorable Cosmo Gordon Lang, evictor of Edward VIII now 76 years old, whom William Temple may eventually succeed as Primate of All England.



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BARONET ACLAND, M. P.  
"The whole structure of society is rotten."