

Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi and Giuseppe Matteucci

'Beware of Tolstoyan Christianity'

Cardinal Biffi gave a thought-provoking speech to the Rimini meeting of the 'Communion and Liberation' movement.

Cardinal Giacomo Biffi launched a serious warning at this year's annual meeting of the Catholic political movement called "Communion and Liberation" (CL) in the Adriatic city of Rimini. The Bologna archbishop, who is a deep theologian as well as a sharp observer of current events, said, "Beware of the Antichrist," he will be "a pacifist and an ecologist."

"I see a mortal danger," the cardinal said, of a "Christianity reduced to pure humanitarian action, a Gospel message identified with the commitment to dialogue between peoples and religions, a Church traded off for a benevolent and socializing organization." In practice, a Christianity which exalts "relative values" (love for nature, for peace, etc.) and distances itself from the truths of the faith.

The "Tolstoyism" Biffi speaks about (from the 19th-century Russian oligarchist novelist Leo Tolstoy) is a Christianity which has drunk deeply from the fount of contemporary culture, a culture of "opinion" which, philosophically, reflects a confusion and weakness typical of *Abgrund* thought (without foundation) or "weak" thought.

"To turn the Church into a purely philanthropic organization, which has no dogma, but at best a moral doctrine, is an idea taken out of contemporary secularism which takes off from Kant and Hegel," says Prof. Dario Composta, who teaches philosophy and law at the Urbaniana University in Rome. "Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason* proposes reducing

Christianity to a purely human morality and comparing it to the moralities with which Christianity was confronted when it first appeared: first Cynicism, whose eminent virtue would be, according to Kant, fortitude; then Epicureanism, whose primary virtue was prudence (the hedonistic calculus); and thirdly Stoicism, whose supreme virtue would be wisdom. The fourth moral system is Christianity, which has holiness as its pinnacle; a rationalist, horizontal concept of holiness which is therefore exposed to two dangers: moral fanaticism and superstition. This is how the Church would be emptied of its supernatural message."

In our day the convictions of classical humanism have been lost, according to which man, by his very nature, is the subject which gives form to and unifies all the various particulars of his own experience, and at the same time is clearly distinct from all that which is not himself, which he can however "know."

Today, instead, the manner of understanding the relation between the sphere of the subject and that of surrounding reality has been changed. There is no longer any objective truth. It has been replaced by subjective truth, with the consequence that it has become impossible to anchor knowledge to a fixed point, to fundamental truths, let alone supernatural truths. The reduction of man to his subjectivity does not free him, but makes him a slave. Where will the individual in his everyday life find the necessary energy to better his own existence, the hope to live? If an integrated vision of

man is lacking, then the individual's strength is no longer concentrated in his nature, but in his will, which is moreover conditioned by historical-social factors and external events.

The risks to which Cardinal Biffi alludes are not only those of falling into a Christ-less Christianity, but also those of forming men and women without a foundation and without an identity, easy preys to the "opinions" of whoever is in power.

The theme of the Communion and Liberation meeting was Antigone, the ancient Greek heroine whose desire to fulfill the commandments of natural law was suffocated by the law of the state and public opinion. In the tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles, the chorus does not announce to Antigone her liberation, but labels her call for freedom "arrogance."

Despite serious epistemological weaknesses, CL has stood up for the principle of justice outside the "right" and "left" political alignments. One example of this is its denunciation of the Gulf war, with its monstrous massacres, which public opinion regards as a war to defend freedom.

An eyewitness report of the persecutions suffered by the Catholic Church in Russia was given by Msgr. Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, apostolic administrator of Moscow, and archbishop since April 13. He told how the Church has survived and is working to recover lost time, "since the latest generations were educated in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism and these roots are firmly entrenched." "This is a huge labor," admitted Monsignor Kondrusiewicz, adding: "We need books, good translators, publishing houses that don't exist in our country. What we are not interested in getting from the West are the degeneracies of consumerism, pornography, drugs, criminality, indifference, luxury, and wastefulness."