

This is simply a sin, due to defective care for truth. To be a realist is not only practical politics, it is a Christian duty.

A CHRISTIAN CAN'T BE A DEFEATIST

But if a Christian can't be an easy optimist, still less can he be a "defeatist." In view of sombre facts it is true he may be tempted to argue like this. "It's not my job as a Christian to worry about public affairs and work for a more Christian order. Let me stick to my proper business, which is to tend my own inner life and that of any others who will let me help them. Till all men are Christians the world must go its own hard-hearted way; and, so far as possible, I must keep myself unspotted from it."

Now this may be plausible, but it's not only unchristian, it's not even honest. It is dishonest because no one can really contract out in this way. The attempt to do so means in practice that you enjoy the advantages of the existing social order without accepting any responsibility for it. You can't just be a rather superior spectator, you are inevitably an actor as well. If you say of any transaction, "Oh, that's business, or that's politics," and imply that it is impossible to judge it by Christian standards, you are really finding an excuse for acting in these spheres in a less Christian way than you might have done. Anyone can see the incongruity in the burly farmer who, one Sunday, was singing lustily, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small," while fumbling in his pocket to make quite sure that it was a six-penny bit and not a shilling that he was going to drop into the offertory bag. But suppose he spent part of Monday in opposing violently any increase in his local rates, quite regardless of the purpose for which the increase was proposed, the contradiction would have been just as great, if not quite so obvious.

This "defeatism" is not only dishonest, but unchristian. It is true you can hardly be a Christian at all if you have never been through something like despair, but a desperate human situation is exactly what Christ came to meet. It is just the kind of men we know and are—weak and unreliable—whom He uses. His own Apostles seem to have been, at

the outset, quite commonplace people. Even Peter, on whom Christ said He built His Church, was capable of acting like "a shuffler, a snob, and a coward." So the desperate social and international situation in which we find ourselves to-day is one with which we know God can deal. It is one in which the most ordinary and ungifted people may find themselves called on to lead a forlorn hope, and if they are, they will find they can do it—not well enough perhaps to earn any sort of medal, but well enough to carry it through.

A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY

In one sense there is even a special opportunity to-day. At ordinary times we are so clogged by routine by the multitude of our possessions, by the hostages which we have given to fortune, that we find it hard to make any venture. Now, willy-nilly, we are likely to be freed from this particular obstacle; for we are less sure than usual that there will be any dinner for us to-morrow or that we shall even be alive. If the rich young man in the Gospel had suddenly lost all his money, perhaps he might not have made his great refusal.

DIFFERENCE MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS WOULD MAKE

What difference is it going to make to the action of British statesmen at the next peace congress that hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of Britons are convinced Christians? Again, what of the vast social changes which every thinking man knows will come out of this war? They may be for the better or for the worse. Are we, as Christians, going simply to sit back and let them happen to us? Or shall we make a sustained effort to discern something of God's plan for them and to play our part in shaping them in accordance with that?

In face of such a task we naturally feel rather helpless. But we all have a duty to try to understand the moral issues involved and to make up our minds about them. At the very least we can be on the look-out for convincing Christian leadership and can respond to it when we get it. We may find it in a book, a newspaper article, a newsletter, or a broadcast talk. If we are all thinking and praying about these issues to the best of our ability, a well-

informed Christian public opinion may emerge which can be a support to Christian statesmen, or, if need be, a warning.

DISCOVERING THINGS THAT ARE WRONG

But just because we are so helpless as individuals, we must find new ways of getting together. In some places to-day little private, informal groups or "cells" are forming themselves. These are groups of Christians who want to bring their religion more closely to bear on their daily lives and work. They meet at regular intervals to try to learn more of their Christian duty to society and to co-operate in doing it. They pray together and they discuss, but both prayer and discussion are to lead up to action. These groups are of two main kinds: One is a group of neighbours. Their object is to discover things that are wrong in their own district, which as Christians they ought to be concerned about and which they could do something to put right. For example, they may find that they themselves can give some special help to unemployed or sick people, to children or delinquents; or they may be able to secure improvements in the public services concerned. Thus they make experiments which may be of use to others. The other type of group is composed of members of the same trade or profession. They consider what there is in the conditions of their work and their professional standards which is a challenge to their common Christianity and what they themselves can do about it. Christian critics from outside can't do this effectively; they don't know enough about the facts. For instance, an ordained minister can seldom tell a company director or a trade union leader how as a Christian man, he ought to run his company or his trade union. The people who can form a valued opinion about that are Christian directors and Christian trade unionists; that is, men in the situation responsible for acting on any conclusions they reach.

Perhaps the most effective step we can take just now towards making the Church the force in the world was meant to be, is to get together a few of your neighbours or of your fellow workers in your industry or profession, and to form one more of these Christian "cells."