

[1957. *Symposium of One. Review of Christianity and World Issues, by T.B. Maston. Christianity Today*
14 Oct.]

SYMPOSIUM OF ONE

Christianity and World Issues, by T.B. Maston, Macmillan, New York, 1957. \$5.00.

In this century Christianity, the church and individual Christians have plenty of world issues with which to occupy their minds. Those discussed in this book include the effects of modern divorce on the family and the race problems in our country, but more space is given to economics and war.

The author's opinions on these world issues are not always clearly stated. He sketches various views and rarely argues in favor of any one. The method makes use of frequent quotations: so and so said this; somebody else said that. This indirect method is pursued still further. For example, a quotation from John C. Bennett is used to give us Niebuhr's position (p. 24), and "Norman Pittenger suggests (!) that *someone* has remarked ..." (p. 307). Eventually this dependence upon other authors' assertions becomes wearisome. Does Dr. Maston accept the sentiments he quotes? Sometimes he does not; much of the time, one cannot tell.

Although no conclusion is discernible with respect to the problem of divorce as it confronts ministers who are asked to marry divorced persons, and although the author assumes without argument that certain procedures relative to the race problems are advantageous, his views on economics, communism and war can somewhat be guessed from the turns of expression and the favorable or unfavorable connotations of words.

Apparently he wants the church to reject both communism and laissez-faire capitalism. Communism, however, seems to be condemned more for its methods than for its aims. One senses a strain of embarrassment that communistic brutality should have received such widespread publicity.

True, the author condemns godless materialism; but planned economy whether in Russian or in the U.S.A. is merely a matter of degree. Free enterprise and its opposite are merely matters of labels (p. 143).

In fact, Christianity is a *source* of communism because it has a messianic eschatology and because it practiced communism in Jerusalem (p. 155); but there is no *historic relation* between the two (p. 156); yet the *roots* of modern communism *go back* to Christian communism (p. 157).

There is no adverse criticism of communistic economics—no criticism of the labor theory of value, or the theory of surplus value, and not much of a defense of private property. "There may not be

a great deal of difference between the ultimate goal or hope of the Christian and the communist for society” (p. 184).

Since communism is so close to Christianity in aim, though drastically different in method, it would be wrong to engage in war to rescue the captive nations. The author is generally pacifistic. “A major duty of Christians is to do everything possible to support and strengthen” the United Nations (p. 266); and he seems to entertain the hope of world peace by human efforts without messianic intervention.

These are bare assertions without argument; no attempt is made to base them on the Bible. “War accomplishes nothing” (p. 288); at least modern war, as distinguished from the American Revolution and the Civil War, settles little, if anything (p. 289). Can we not therefore conclude that it would have been better to allow Hitler to conquer the world?

The great defect of the book, and the probable cause of its frequent inconclusiveness, is that no firm foundation of argument is selected. The opinions are impressionistic. They are not founded on scriptural revelation for no clear notion of the role of the Bible emerges. Several times the author appeal to “the centrality of the cross,” but the phrase remains ambiguous. “Can any crucifixion [including Christ's?] be identified with cross? No ... The cross is a symbol of the self-denying, suffering, redemptive love. ... It means the giving of oneself in the interest or on behalf of others” (p. 338).

The cross! But where is Christ?

GORDON H. CLARK