It is not pleasant to us, in our surroundings of freedom and relative tolerance, to realize that a majority of the earth's population live under the governance of dictatorial systems. Confronting the West, with its democratic traditions, are two configurations of political types: there is a series of semi-Fascist states, many of them essentially feudal in type, comprising much of West Africa, South America, Spain, India and Malaysia; and there is the walled-in Soviet dictatorship, extending from the Stettin-Trieste Line to the Chinese Sea. This latter realm of darkness is working feverishly, both above and below ground, to extend its cruel shadow over the entire world.

History affords us the perspective with which to see that our day is not the first in which dictatorship has menaced the world. Indeed, the term “Dictator” has not always been the fearsome thing which it has latterly become. In Greece, after the days of the overthrow of the hereditary sovereigns (basileiai), the tyrannoi were men, usually eminently respectable, who in times of great emergency obtained absolute power. The term was by no means unequivocally evil: it usually connoted the manner in which power was gained, rather than the manner in which it was exercised. The genial Pisistratus was thus called “the Tyrant,” and only later did the term come to imply reproach.

In republican Rome, the dictator was a magistrate appointed by the Senate, in times of peril, to absolute authority. His constitutional powers expired at the end of three or six months. The Senate usually or always appointed a respectable member of Rome’s aristocracy to this position, and before 60 B.C. no Roman dictator attempted to establish himself in a position of permanent power. It was when the Roman aristocracy became decadent that plebeian (the ancient counterpart of “proletarian”) armies sought to elevate their generals to a place of complete power. Julius Caesar stands as the epitome of the newly-emerging dictator, one of many com-
peting generals who succeeded in overthrowing government by constitution and proceeded to exercise absolute power without the restrictions of constitutional government. In general, the thinkers of the ancient world rejected this theory of government. Only some of the Stoics accepted it, and even they did so upon metaphysical grounds, namely, that the constitution of the world made it inevitable that the "best man" should rise to the ascendancy. Plato and Aristotle had reprehended all despotisms, so that the latter even broke fellowship with his pupil, Alexander the Great, as he beheld the growing tendencies toward despotism in his government.

Nevertheless, Roman dictatorship became an accepted pattern in the post-Christian world, and the first three Christian centuries witnessed the development of most of the tactics which mark modern dictators. It is instructive to notice these tactics, and to set them in contrast to the principles for which the Christian Evangel stands.

Dictators have historically made large use of messianic promises, by which subjects are induced to overlook the woes and miseries of today in the hope of a bright future—perhaps generations ahead. As one has said, "If the Western world lives in debt to the past, the Soviet world lives in debt to the future." One of the pathetic factors in lands under modern tyrants is the glowing faith of the subjects in a radiant world of tomorrow—perhaps for children or grandchildren. —Pathetic, we say; for messianism under a false messiah is hardly likely to produce a millennium, even after long lapse of time.

While the foregoing technique is employed to keep subjects in a "contented" subjection, it is given a peculiar turn when applied to those more fortunate in their present conditions. Here the appeal is to the social, political, and economic psychoses which recur in a progressive society. Every grievance and very psychological uneasiness is inflated, until even prominent and prosperous members of relatively healthy societies become convinced that the present is dark and only a "strong hand" can produce a roseate sunrise tomorrow. One needs only to read the chronicle of communism in Hollywood to see the way in which some (though certainly not all, nor even most) of the most grossly overpaid individuals in America have inclined toward the left. Communist leaders have not overlooked the power of a conscience, bothered by too-large financial reward, to turn the individual sour and to distort his vision.
Personal frustrations, based upon every conceivable factor, are cleverly exploited by dictators, who seem scarcely to need any coaching in the art of steering malcontents into a course of persecution complex and toward a messianism based upon nihilism with respect to existing conditions and institutions. Those individuals who are "unhappy inside" are often easy prey to appeals from the "persecuted," however specious their grievances.

Dictators in the ancient world were quick to perceive the possible utility of religion to their cause. One of their crude efforts was in the direction of claiming religious sanction for their positions and finally for their persons. Disloyalty thus becomes robed with the fearsome aspect of sacrilege. With the decay of classical paganism, this type of appeal lost its force; and ancient dictatorships left the more modern varieties with the heavy task of fashioning their own equivalent to the "religious" appeal.

In modern systems of dictatorship, the "state," a ponderous and (to some) impressive entity, becomes the divinity. The realistic concept of the state, to which the individual must be radically subordinated, is basic to the tyrant. In the Nazi state, the primitive concept of the clan dominated political theory, and the system represented a curious blending of technical culture with rank tribalism. Those who came under the spell of this system did not doubt, at the time at least, that das Volk was a "real" entity, to whom individual persons owed much, and, if an emergency demanded it, everything.

The raw faith of Communists in the infallibility of the Soviet system is another tribute to the power of the idea of the "divine state" over the minds of some men. The story of Communism in America is an astounding testimony to the ability even of educated persons to adore the "state." One needs only watch the tortuous course of the Communist line—through the "honeymoon" period following 1933, the Russo-Finnish War, the days of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Nazi invasion of Russia, and the post-war period—to observe that devotion to the Soviet cause has a power over its devotees fully equivalent to that power which religion has over the minds and hearts of the faithful.

This tendency to view the state as a divinity leads, of course, to a complete subversion of the Christian ethic. To the devotee of the great Colossus, no scruples concerning truth or virtue must
impede effort to stamp out opposition and to entrench the power of
the mighty Reality. Politically speaking, this type of thought makes
more than one party an absurdity. If the Party is infallible, why
should there be another? This accounts for the voluble protestations
of "democracy" in the Soviet Union.

The use of elaborate and comprehensive systems of espionage
against its own citizens is another staple of dictatorship. This, by
the way, is not new. Says Epictetus: "An agent sits by you in or-
dinary dress and begins to speak ill of the ruler. Then you, as if
you had received a pledge of his fidelity by his first beginning the
abuse, say likewise what you think; and so you are led away in
chains to execution." This has a strangely modern sound to any who
know conditions in Germany between 1933 and 1945, or to those
familiar with procedures behind the Iron Curtain today.

The objective of repressive measures is a total conquest of the
human mind. To this end, the most brutal means of thought con-
trol are standard equipment with the contemporary dictator. De-
viationism becomes the number one crime. "True" and "false" are
wholly relative terms; truth is conceived instrumentally, so that a
given proposition is true or false insofar as it contributes to the
maintenance of the ruling clique in a position of power. In the con-
quest of the mind, terror and physical violence are (to the dictator)
legitimate instruments. The "confessions" which are made by the
accused at spy trials in Russia and in the satellite countries bear
witness to the diabolical cleverness with which "unfriendly" ele-
ments are browbeaten and abused until the signing of the most
absurd protestations of guilt appears as the only possible course of
action.

The Christian world will be well advised to be realistic in its
approach to these unpalatable techniques. The day is now long past
when the thinking man can be expected to believe the bland ex-
planation that such reports concerning Communist lands are the
result of "capitalist propaganda." This is exactly what the present-
day aspirants to world empire, directed from Moscow, would have
us believe. Moreover, part of the present wave of hysteria in the
United States may well be a reaction to the unrealistic attitude of
our nation toward the Red menace from 1933 to 1946.

To return, however, to our original theme: vital Christianity
must, by virtue of her essential message, be opposed to dictator-
Christ and the Dictators

ships, whether of the ancient or the modern variety. Some will argue that conflict will come only when and if Christianity associates herself with existing economic interests. This is a superficial view, which fails to take into account the real nature of the Christian message, which insists that there is an area of human loyalties which belong to God alone. Nor is it enough to suggest that the basis for the conflict is some "belief in the infinite worth of personality." Certainly redeemed personality is precious in the sight of God. But a major problem in the modern world is that of maintaining a social order within which the free propagation of the Christian Evangel is possible, and in which believing men and women may live their lives in devotion to God.

Our faith is, that the gates of hell (even with the banner of Hammer and Sickle floating above them) will not prevail against the Church. It must be recognized, however, that the spread of the Evangel of Christ is vastly more effective under certain social and political conditions than under others. Moreover, the progressive encroachments of dictatorships upon the total life and thought are such as to make it exceedingly difficult to be a Christian in lands thus ruled. Probably the conflict between Christ and Caesar is more acute, in the long run, under Sovietism than under most of the other existing forms of "strong" government.

In any case, Christians will be well advised to remember that the issues between Christ and the dictators are not superficial, but that they are as deep as life itself and as numerous as the complex elements which make up human life. By the same token, the most effective resistance to Soviet Imperialism is not to be found in vast ecclesiastical institutions wielding earthly power, nor in embassies in Vatican City. Rather, it is the resistance which comes from men and women of clear vision whose hearts burn with devotion to Him who has a right to claim a total loyalty and total commitment.

H. B. K.