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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

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CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND WORLD PEACE

WHEN the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches assembled at Lucknow in December, 1952, the Bishop of Chichester, who serves the office of chairman of the committee, justly observed that its meeting on Asian territory was an historic occasion. In his introductory address, Dr. Bell directed the attention of those present to the pressing issues of peace and war in the world. "The World Council of Churches stands before the nations and before the United Nations as a world-wide fellowship, appealing for an end of hatred and suspicion and war, declaring that the world of nations is one single family and that all are responsible for their neighbour's welfare."¹ Christian witness has to be given at a time when the society of nations is in a state of anarchy, and the disorder evident in the church is a grievous hindrance to the giving of this witness and a still greater hindrance to its acceptance by those to whom it is offered. Nevertheless, the director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Dr. O. F. Nolde, in his report² to the committee was able to show many ways in which Christian witness was assisting a world peace movement. He acknowledged the need for popular action and great public appeals, but suggested that with its limited resources the commission had chosen "to break new ground in organizing a continuing Christian witness to the world of nations", in an effort to attack the root causes of war and to resist immediate threats to peace. Much of this work must of necessity be unspectacular and lacking in dramatic appeal, so that a great deal of what is attempted and even achieved in the field by Christian effort is little known to the general public. Impatience at the apparent lack of Christian action for peace ought to be tempered by the realization that the action which counts can rarely be publicized on the grand scale. Politicians and governments tend to resist pressure when it is exerted in public, and it is often their plain duty to do so.

The report presented to the Lucknow meeting indicates four directions in which this "continuing Christian witness" has been given "at the time and place of international political decision". First, by representations to political leaders and to governments, every effort has been made to prevent the extension of the conflict in Korea and to urge the need for a negotiated settlement. The convictions and proposals of Christians for an issue of this kind are more likely to be of some influence on the course of events if they are not exploited publicly as means of propaganda. Secondly, the great experience possessed

¹ *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. V, No. 3 (April, 1953), p. 231.

² Printed in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. V, No. 3, pp. 261-269.

by the Christian Church in a variety of pilot projects has both indicated the kind of work that can be done for the economic and social advancement of backward peoples and served as a Christian witness to the importance of the manner in which technical assistance is offered to such peoples. "There is no room for superiority, condescension or charity. The attack upon the tragic social problems of undeveloped countries must be made in a spirit of partnership, with full respect for the dignity and integrity of the people who are assisted."¹ Thirdly, service to refugees and stateless persons has been planned and carried through on a considerable scale, while governments have been reminded in a forcible way of the great share of the responsibility for the existence of this tragic problem which rests upon them by reason of their policies. Fourthly, the commission, in the name of the churches it exists to serve, has plunged into the struggle to safeguard basic human rights and to defend human liberty. The persistent and scandalous denial of religious freedom in Colombia has been a matter of great and growing concern. In those diverse ways the church is exercising a ministry of reconciliation in the world of to-day, but the full effectiveness of this ministry depends in no small measure "upon the enlightened conscience, the faith and the intelligent action"² of ordinary Christians at the parochial level.

CHURCH RELATIONS IN ENGLAND

THE report on *Church Relations in England*, which embodied the results of the latest series of discussions between Anglicans and members of the Evangelical Free Churches, was published towards the close of 1950. The hope was expressed that each of the communions whose representatives had taken part in the conferences would give the most careful attention to the proposed conditions named in the report for the inauguration of a new period of church history in England, during which separated Christians might begin to grow together. It was recognized that those conditions would cut across cherished traditions and habits so that no communion would find it easy to implement the proposals. It cannot be said that the suggestion offered to the Free Churches, that without losing their independent identity they should take episcopacy into their own systems, has elicited a warm response. But they have shown themselves reluctant to reject out of hand a suggestion intended to assist the growing together of Christians, although they have grave doubts both of its wisdom and of its practicability. The Baptist Union has lately authorized³ the publication of the considered views of the committee which it set up to examine the proposals of the joint conference set out in the report of 1950. This new document from Baptist sources demands the careful scrutiny of Anglicans, as well for its general approach to the problems of intercommunion as for its particular observations.

In the first place it is asserted that the 1950 report "does not really

¹ op. cit., p. 265.

² ibid. p. 269.

³ *Church Relations in England*: The Report of a Special Committee of the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (Carey Kingsgate Press, pp. 15, March, 1953).

indicate the right step forward", nor does it "offer a plan of development which Baptists would consider it either right or practicable to try to implement".¹ It is probable that many Anglicans also would be ready to agree that the terms of the report have revealed a disproportionate emphasis in current Christian thinking on the form of the ministry, so that episcopacy has come to be isolated in the wrong way in these inter-confessional discussions. To conclude, however, that the original suggestion of the Archbishop does not, upon close examination, point a way forward is not to disregard the generous and hopeful spirit which prompted the Cambridge sermon. For this reason the Baptists permit themselves the hope that conversations between the churches will be continued. It is a hope that others will be ready to endorse; but to be fruitful such conversations will require very wide terms of reference, while the churches will do well to be prepared for a very long period without any fresh concrete proposals.

Secondly, these Baptist comments disclose the fact that non-episcopal communions, while showing themselves open to consider the acceptance of an episcopate as an element in a united church, have not formally committed themselves to the acceptance of the historic episcopate. Nothing but disappointment and estrangement can come from action which proceeds upon the assumption that non-episcopal communions have already so committed themselves. Moreover, in common with other traditions Baptists as a denomination have their domestic difficulties in the practice of intercommunion which must be resolved before there can be much progress in their relations with other communions. Their committee has felt bound to acknowledge that so long as "these ambiguities remain and Baptists are divided amongst themselves, they must be slow to criticize other denominations who do not feel able to authorize immediate intercommunion among all Christians".²

Thirdly, this report bears witness to the fact that Baptists have not receded from their historic claim for the local congregation as the sufficient embodiment of the fullness of order and authority of the whole church. The great volume of work upon the doctrine of the church which in recent decades has been stimulated by the ecumenical movement does not seem to have caused them to make any significant variation in their ecclesiology. For Baptists, the local church continues to bear that representative character which in the Anglican tradition is embodied in the bishop. "A properly authenticated and recognized ministry there should be, but this does not in our view depend upon having a special order of bishops."³ Ordination is regarded as a function of the whole church, but the whole church fulfils this function, not through an ordaining minister who, by reason of his office and status, can represent the whole church to the local church, but through the fellowship of the local church. Baptists, the report adds,⁴ "find no difficulty in allowing any church member—man or woman—to preach and administer the sacraments on occasion, provided such person is duly authorized by the local church in which these acts take place". Thus the local church is corporately a bishop in its authority

¹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

³ *ibid.*, p. 7.

² *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴ p. 8.

and functions. The principles of authorization and the representative character of ministerial acts are explicitly recognized in this way, but their effect does not seem to extend beyond the congregations by whose acts they are invoked. It is possible that the gulf between Anglican and Baptists is not so great as would appear at first sight, if the problems are brought down to their essential features and a work of mutual theological enlightenment is pursued with the desire to achieve a genuine understanding of each other's position.

It is strange that the modifications of church order amongst Baptists to which reference is made (the appointment of General Superintendents, the grouping of churches, and the Baptist Union itself) are defined as the consequence "of new insights into the mind of Christ for our churches" and not as a groping towards those episcopal elements in the life of the church which have been the traditional concern of Anglicans. A heavy responsibility must rest upon Anglicans to expound more adequately the meaning and functions of episcopacy, exercised by chief pastors, as an indispensable function of the church. Here is the justification, if justification be needed, for the continuation of frank and unrestricted conversations between the churches. The most hopeful feature of this Baptist commentary on the original report is the avowal, "we are not satisfied with church relations in England as they are at present",¹ and the professed readiness to re-think traditional assumptions and cherished convictions in the light of Christian testimony from other communions. It is greatly to be desired that some official response to this acknowledgment will come from the Church of England.

MISSION, CHURCH AND STATE IN EAST AFRICA

RECENT events in East Africa have directed the attention of a much larger number of persons than the small, well informed groups of mission supporters to this most important area of the modern Christian expansion from Europe. Within little more than a century of the first establishment of European missions in this part of the once dark continent, African nationalism has begun its revolt against the civilization, religion and supremacy of the white man. An understanding of this century of political and missionary history, its achievements and failures, is a prerequisite to the formation of a Christian judgment upon the issues of the hour. Dr. Roland Oliver of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London has, in an important monograph,² provided a good deal of the necessary material for this purpose, taking as his text the significant words uttered by William Temple at the Jerusalem Conference in 1928, "the only purely spiritual phenomena are good intentions, and we all know what portion of the universe is paved with them".

The narrative begins with a summary of European interests in East Africa in 1856 when, after his great journey across central Africa, Livingstone returned to England convinced that only the impact of civilized and Christian society as a whole could remove the great

¹ p. 11.

² *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* by Roland Oliver (Longmans, 1952, pp. 302, 17/6).

obstacles to the Gospel—poverty, ignorance, tribal degradation, and slavery. In his book *Missionary Travels*, which appeared a few months later, Livingstone defined the phrase, 'missionary enterprise' to include "every effort made for the amelioration of our race, the promotion of all those means by which God in His providence is working".¹ These observations were not very congenial to evangelical supporters who paid and prayed for conversions, and as late as 1894 a retired Indian Civil Servant, who was an indefatigable member of the C.M.S. committee, declared,² "I am entirely in favour of the lay evangelist, the female evangelist, the medical evangelist, whenever gospel-preaching is the substantive work; but when it is proposed to have a pious industrial superintendant, or an evangelical tile-manufacturer, or a low-church breeder of cattle or raiser of turnips, I draw my line". Nevertheless the conclusions of Livingstone attracted an England obsessed with the idea of progress and did much to promote "the wider than ecclesiastical policies which missions came to pursue".³

The freed-slave settlements at the coast which in the sixties of last century were the primary concern of missionary supporters at home had little chance of survival unless they could be defended against the attacks of independent warlike tribes in the neighbourhood and a rudimentary economy developed to supply the means of subsistence. These necessities involved the missionaries in a range of operations—military, economic and ultimately political—far beyond anything that had at first been contemplated. But confidence in the worth of its own culture was still high in Europe and it was considered a part of Christian duty to extend the benefits of Christian civilization to those who lacked them. Missionaries soon became great employers of labour for the transport of supplies and the erection of mission stations, so that Bishop Smythies was able to affirm in a sermon preached in 1887: "Wherever we have settled for long the slave trade is coming to an end. People are able to get cloth without buying, selling or catching each other".⁴ New information about East Africa began to find its way into the proceedings of learned societies, and even into school atlases, largely through the pioneer efforts of missionaries in geographical exploration and in mastering African languages and dialects.

It was in 1885 that the promotion of German colonialism by rich Hamburg merchants, working through the German East Africa Company, set in train a course of events which associated missions much more closely with the militant imperialism of Europe and thus affected their future standing in East Africa. The Arabs, who had for so long maintained the trade in ivory and slaves, but who had not previously shown any desire to establish territorial control and had kept good relations with the white traders, now, in fear of the probable consequences of German imperial expansion, sought political power to drive out the European. The struggle with the Arabs, culminating in several pitched battles between 1888 and 1890, taught the missions to regard imperialism as a merciful intervention by European powers,

¹ op. cit., p. 673.

² op. cit., p. 9.

³ Oliver, op. cit., p. 25.

⁴ op. cit., pp. 69-70.

necessary to save tropical Africa from the domination of Islam. Once this intervention was accepted as a necessity, missionaries used all their influence (as in the close connection of C.M.S. with the British acquisition of Uganda) to ensure that intervention should be carried out by their own countrymen. Few politicians of the time had sufficient prescience to see that American economic development would make the discovery of new markets in Africa essential for British industrial development.

The new European occupation of East Africa, which proceeded apace during the closing years of the nineteenth century, while promising to remove most of the dangers and difficulties which so far had attended missionary work, also stimulated a considerable enlargement of the scope of the missionary enterprise, by new societies as well as those already established in the field. Dr. Oliver regards the decade before the first world war as the period which marks the zenith of missionary influence.¹ The European ordained missionary governed unaided at the centre of the church. He legislated about native customs and church discipline. He controlled the finances. "It was a time when European priests and ministers trudged incessantly over vast parishes, encouraging evangelists, baptizing catechumens and dispensing the sacraments to church members, when bishops tramped a thousand miles a year to supervise, ordain and confirm."

After the first world war, European churches could supply fewer men and less money to carry on this work. In these circumstances it became clear that an African church had been planted and an increasing flow of African ordinands came to be a marked feature of church life. Africans were slowly learning the lessons of leadership and responsibility. The war did not apparently destroy the prestige of Christianity and western civilization in the mind of the African. This was the period (between 1918 and 1939) when the white settlers came into those territories, acquired great tracts of land and sought for a constant supply of cheap African labour. The missionaries on many occasions found themselves opposed to the policies of the settlers and their government and strove to point the way to a more just, multi-racial society. They stood as intermediaries between the African Church and the European state. The attempts of Governor Northey in 1919 to exert "every possible lawful influence to induce able-bodied male natives to go into the labour field" was opposed as a form of near slave labour. In East Africa the different denominations worked together, while in England Dr. J. H. Oldham, the secretary of the Conference of British Missionary Societies, made himself a master of the land and labour problem. More than any other man Oldham was responsible for the White Paper of July, 1923 which stated categorically "that the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that if and when those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail".² It is particularly instructive to recall the terms of this declaration when the present disturbances are under review. Facts like these, together with the great services rendered by mission schools to the cause of African leadership, account for the remarkable extent to which East African

¹ op. cit., p. 229.

² Quoted in Oliver, p. 262.

Christians have remained loyal to the church even under the pressure of rising nationalism. The danger which now besets the church in East Africa is that it should possess an African ministry which is not adequate to the demands made upon it. "The ministry is the one profession which has not so far gained from higher education."¹ The decisive act of the missionary drama must in coming years be played out in the theological colleges and secondary schools of East Africa and through the impact of European Christianity upon students from Africa who come to Europe.

PASTORAL OPPORTUNITIES

THE Parish Meeting has been a marked feature of pastoral revivals in the Church of England during the last two decades. There is no doubt about its importance as a means whereby local parts of the Body of Christ can express their true nature and fulfil their functions. If the slogan 'Let the church be the church' has any meaning at all, an important part of its content will be found in parish meetings. Those who have had experience of taking part in such a meeting as well as those who are hesitant about it will welcome a new pamphlet, *The Parish Meeting at Work* by Alan Ecclestone.² The questions to which he attempts to give some answers are the questions likely to be in the minds of many church people. How do you begin? What do you do? What are the difficulties? What is the place of the Parochial Church Council in a church where the parish meeting is an important pastoral activity? The answers which are given are born of long experience in this difficult but rewarding meeting.

Three further comments may be allowed. First, there is no easy and simple technique for a parish meeting. It involves personal relationships at such a depth that many will draw back, while those who do engage in it will have to be ready for a sharpening of tensions. Secondly, the business of the meeting will include every aspect of the church's life and responsibility: the problems of individual members in the world and public affairs. Its concerns are as wide as life itself. Thirdly, in such a meeting, ordinary churchmen can share the opportunity of discovering the meaning of the priestliness of the whole body in which they share. The pastor in the meeting is one with the people, and the pastor-church castigated by Brunner gives way to a genuine people's church in which the specialized ministry of word and sacrament has an appropriate function to fulfil.

¹ Oliver, p. 292.

² S.P.C.K. (1953), pp. 47, 2/6.