

## The Missionary Motive.

DR. WHEELER ROBINSON has told us that it is in the missionary meeting that one can feel the heart-beat of the Baptist people. While rejoicing in our constant concern for missionary work and the many triumphs won overseas, it may do us good to pause and ask ourselves why we really believe in missions, and why we plead with others to support them. This subject is dealt with in one of a series of theological studies edited by Karl Barth. The title of this particular work may be translated as *The Basis of Catholic and Protestant Missionary Apologetic*, and its author is Hans Schärer.<sup>1</sup>

The method of the author is to place side by side the Catholic and Protestant positions, to contrast them, and then say what he thinks should be the dominant notes of Protestant apologetic today. His references are intentionally restricted to the issue as it presents itself in Germany, but he claims that they apply with equal validity to the Anglo-Saxon world. The authorities he quotes are, on the Catholic side, Schmidlin's *Outline of Catholic Missionary Apologetic*, and Thomas Ohm's *The Relation of the Heathen to Nature and the Supernatural* and, on the Protestant side, Warneck's *Theory of Evangelical Missions*, and Kraemer's *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*.

According to Schmidlin, Catholic apologetic rests on a dual basis of the supernatural and the natural. The supernatural basis for missions is found in the Biblical teachings of God's sovereignty and of the universal solidarity which men find as His creatures, and in the credal truth that He is the only true God, rewarding them that seek Him and condemning those who do not believe. The very nature of God requires that the world should be brought to believe in Him, and He as the universal Creator has made all men in His own image, thereby ensuring an affinity between them and Himself. The natural basis of missions, according to Schmidlin, lies in the absoluteness of Christianity compared with all other religions and proved by the superiority of its dogma, its morals and its cultural achievements. It is interesting to note that he seeks to justify missionary work on the ground that it helps colonisation, inducing into the natives a spirit of obedience to

<sup>1</sup> *Die Begründung der Mission in der Katholischen und evangelischen Missionswissenschaft*. Theologische Studien. Heft 16. Evangelischer Verlag A. G. Zollikon-Zurich, 1944.

their rulers! But the main argument is in the relation of Christianity to the rest of humanity; there is nothing in Christianity which any man cannot accept, and there is nothing in mankind which prevents it from accepting it. On both sides, then, natural links can be forged which bind both together without asking of the recipients any real self-sacrifice, or involving Christianity in any identification with them. Thus human nature is not destroyed or replaced, but raised and transfigured. Moreover, mankind is ready and waiting for just some such thing to happen, for all men are naturally religious, even if some of their religions are nothing but distortions of the true Catholic faith. In their hearts they all want God, are conscious of sin and long for redemption. This natural basis is vindicated by the past and present history of Christian missions, according to Schmidlin. He points to the way in which infant Christianity conquered the corrupt Roman world and brought moral cleansing and social graces in its train. So, today, the ancient faiths of a corrupt society are tottering, and men are longing again for something better. Fortified by the triumphs of the past, the Christian missionary can go forward and find in the present position a bridgehead which waits to be captured and exploited. The dual basis of Catholic missions rests upon the belief that there is still some relationship, if not actual affinity, between God and the heathen. These darkened multitudes have turned away from God and given themselves to the worship of created things, but, the Catholic apologists insist, they have not been abandoned by God. Heathenism is not unbelief but superstition, not positive enmity towards God, but a perversion of true religion. Ohm declares that the heathen are not totally depraved nor are their wills irrevocably given over to evil; the divine image is still there in their hearts, and sin means only that instead of doing good easily they can do it only with difficulty. Moreover, runs the argument, there is an excuse for the heathen, for they have had no great prophets like the Jews to lead them to God. Yet they have not been totally deprived of divine grace, which is active in them even now and produces in them good works. According to Catholic apologetic foreign missions are both necessary and possible; necessary because the heathen cannot of themselves come to know God, and they need help so that their nature may be elevated; possible because there is in the heathen a capacity to receive the grace by which this can come about. There is no fundamental contradiction between nature and grace, as can be seen, for instance, in the Virgin Mary, in whom is effected a union of the two. Without her, God could not produce a man, and without Him she could not produce a God-Man. It is only this human receptivity that makes missions possible; only if there is

some liaison between human nature and divine grace can anything be achieved.

The author now directs us to the Protestant apologetic and refers us to the two authorities, Warneck's *Evangelische Missionslehre* and Kraemer's *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. Many of the arguments advanced can scarcely be distinguished from those of the Catholic scholars and, indeed, there is a striking similarity between the positions held by these two sections of the Church which are so sharply divided on almost every other issue. Warneck begins with the dogmatic argument. Christianity is the absolute religion, the final revelation of God, and, since He is One, there can be only one salvation for all men. This is to be found in Christ, the Universal Man who restores fallen man to the original purpose of God. Made in the divine image, man is aware of God, though fallen. Like the Prodigal Son remembering the Father's house and hoping for the Father's grace, he still has a longing in his heart for God. This can be satisfied only through justification by faith, which is not an achievement of man, but a receiving of what God offers. Next comes the Biblical argument. According to the Scriptural doctrine of creation, men are related not only to one another by blood and intellect, but also to God; they form a family whose Father is the great Creator of heaven and earth, and whose aim is to find eternal life in fellowship with Him. Such a fellowship comes from a divine call, which in its turn comes through the Word. Believing in this Word presupposes hearing, hearing presupposes preaching and preaching presupposes missions. Through missions a Church has been gathered of peoples who once were heathen, which now plays an important rôle in world history. It is no accident that the lands which have become Christian are now the bearers of culture and the determining factors of the world's future. According to Warneck, there have been three periods in which missions have had open doors of opportunity set before them:—(i) the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic age, with the opportunities afforded by the Pax Romana and the use of the *κοινή* Greek; (ii) the Middle Ages and centuries following, the times of the crusades and the great geographical discoveries; (iii) the beginning of the present century (Warneck wrote in 1900), with the expansion and colonising of the Western Powers. Warneck deals next with the natural basis of missions. The "given" things, the divine Word and grace, are given a certain welcome from within man, for he has a divine image not completely obliterated, a capacity for salvation, a power to recognise God, which needs only to be directed aright. This is the missionary "bridgehead" which can lead to the capture of the whole man. All these religious aspirations of heathen man are a distortion of

the one true religion given in the Christian revelation, by which they are weighed and found wanting. Warneck anticipates here the theory of Father W. Schmidt; that primitive man had a pure, monotheistic, ethical religion from which there has been a gradual decline due to a misuse of human freedom and resulting in polytheism and pantheism. The author assures us that this theory has been proved untrue by anthropological research.

Concerning missions themselves, the Protestant apologetic claims, like the Catholic, that they are both necessary and possible. From God's side they are necessary for the fulfilment of His plan of salvation for man, while from the human side they are necessary if the heathen are to be led into the way home to God, after which they are groping. Concerning their possibility there is also a double argument. Firstly, Christianity is universally adaptable and acceptable; and, secondly, heathenism presents a strong bridgehead which Christianity can exploit for its own advance and for the good of the heathen themselves. Thus says Warneck: "The Gospel finds in heathenism the meal out of which the loaf has to be baked; it introduces the leaven which, mixed with the meal, produces the dough." All existing ideas of God and longings after Him are a bridgehead which the skilful missionary can use; even the troubled or sleeping conscience can be an ally in the preaching of the Gospel. The missionary can, moreover, depend on the heathen having the power to discriminate between truth and falsehood, right and wrong; there is something in him which will respond when the true God is preached to him. This can only be explained as the working of prevenient grace, and should enable the missionary to know that his mission is one not of destruction but of fulfilment. The affirmation which thus comes in the heathen heart at the hearing of the Word is the "sowing" of God the Creator, now responding to the Word of God the Saviour.

We are now invited to contrast the Catholic and the Protestant apologetic, and to note that there is scarcely any difference between them. Schmidlin, the Catholic writer quoted already, admits that "the Catholic and Protestant conceptions go hand in hand." This, we are told, is due to the influence of Ritschl and Schleiermacher on Protestant thought, to the exclusion of good Reformed teaching such as that of Kohlbrügge, Blumhardt and Theodosius Harnack. It is the dual basis of Protestant thought which comes in for the heaviest fire. It is denounced as being untrue to genuine evangelical Reformed teaching and as leading as a logical consequence to Thomism or the relativism of Troeltsch, or the blood and soil myths of Rosenberg. It is not an ally but an enemy, and has not served the Church but the Devil.

Schärer makes it clear that his conception of heathenism is radically different from that which is shared by the Catholic and Protestant apologists. Heathenism is not blindly seeking after God but is totally opposed to Him; its very essence is self-assertion and self-deification; it is enmity towards God. Nor need one look outside it for an explanation of those longings and concepts which fill the heathen heart; it is a complete and closed system in itself. Even the view that heathenism is a perverted form of true religion does not do justice to this closed system or to the Biblical teaching about it, but represents a hesitant and uncertain theology which shocks the anthropologist, since heathenism takes itself far more seriously than this. What, asks Schärer, constitutes the uniqueness of Christianity? For it is this and this alone that must serve as the basis for Protestant apologetic. It is the revelation of God in Christ, through whom sinful men may be justified in God's sight. This, and not its monotheism or its prophetic character, is the distinguishing mark of Christianity, and this alone must be the one basis for all missionary work. This, too, must be the burden of the missionary's declaration to the heathen and, in making it, he need not wonder whether there is any bridgehead to aid his message, any point at which his message and the longings of his hearers coincide. All this is unnecessary to God, who creates belief through the continual operation of the Holy Spirit.

This concentration on the divine initiative to the exclusion of any consideration of the longings and aspirations of man is what we might expect in an essay produced under the editorship of Karl Barth. Here we have the theology of extreme contrasts, showing us man as a defiant rebel, neither wanting God nor conscious of Him, yet becoming the object of His redeeming love in Christ. No one will question the reality of the divine initiative, or suggest that missionary work can be effective without the enlightenment and power of the Holy Spirit; but many will continue to believe, despite Hans Schärer and Karl Barth, that there is in man a capacity for receiving the Gospel and a need which cries out for its help. The dual basis of missions, which Schärer would reject, has its place in the New Testament. There is the command of the Saviour, "Go ye into all the world," and there is the responding cry of the man of Macedonia, "Come over and help us!" It may be that the cry of the heathen is not always a conscious and specific appeal for the Gospel, but the missionary knows, as surely Paul knew, that it arises from a need which only the Gospel can meet. The impulse to missionary service, said our own Dr. Fullerton, is the resultant of two forces, the divine command and the human appeal. Those who listened to the B.M.S. sermon in Westminster Chapel this year were

reminded that all missionary enterprise resulted from "a push from behind and a pull from in front," which is another way of saying the same thing.

If this be so, it must surely be rash to say that all heathenism is nothing but open rebellion against God. But then we are accustomed to exaggerated statements from our Barthian friends! A more balanced view would surely take into account the vast amount of ignorance amongst the heathen, and would see in much of their mistaken beliefs and pitiable practices a groping after the true God. Is it not along some such line as this that most of our missionaries work today, seeking hopefully for some point of contact which will serve as a bridgehead for the further advance of the Gospel until all has been conquered? The question could best be answered by a missionary or a Christian anthropologist with actual experience of this kind of work. But as one whose missionary work is done amid the old-world charm of a Cotswold market town, the present writer knows that in most of the men and women outside the Gospel's influence there is a bridgehead which can be prayerfully and successfully used for the advance of the Kingdom. Some would call it the divine image, now battered and faint like the King's head on an old coin. Some would say it was the distant calling of the voice of God. Others would simply call it conscience. But it is to this that every Christian preacher must make his main appeal; and, as James Denney wrote forty years ago, this appeal cannot be made too soon, too urgently, too desperately, or too hopefully.

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