

Editorial

A YEAR after the formal constitution and first assembly of the World Council of Churches we present in this issue of **THE CHURCHMAN** a series of articles which attempt to assess the significance and survey the achievement of the Amsterdam Assembly. Undoubtedly the occasion was one of supreme importance in the history of the modern Church, representing as it did the climax of some forty years' ecumenical endeavour which have witnessed a slow but sure drawing together of the churches. The articles that follow trace this story and offer some quite candid comments and impressions. The writers are all men who have been closely identified with the ecumenical movement in general and the World Council of Churches in particular. In dealing with such a subject we were particularly happy to have promises of help from two well known Free Church scholars, the Rev. D. T. Niles of the Methodist Missionary Society, and the Rev. Cecil Northcott, of the London Missionary Society. Their contributions are genuinely welcome in this journal of Anglican theology. In thanking them and the other writers for their co-operation, we also take the opportunity of expressing our gratitude to Mr. Kenneth Grubb for his assistance and advice in planning the articles in this issue.

In preparation for Amsterdam a series of papers was written and circulated among those who were to be members of the various Commissions of the Assembly in order to form the basis of their discussions. These papers are now published in four volumes¹, corresponding to the four main sections of the Assembly, which under the general theme of "Man's Disorder and God's Design" dealt with the following aspects of the subject :

1. The Universal Church in God's Design.
2. The Church's Witness to God's Design.
3. The Church and the Disorder of Society.
4. The Church and the International Disorder.

We cordially commend these volumes to the attention of our readers. It would be a very real loss if they were to be overlooked and did not receive the careful attention they deserve. Between them they deal with all the big issues facing the Church of to-day, and the writers are, without exception, men and women of eminence in their several spheres.

In the first volume the Church is boldly put in the forefront of the picture as holding the key to the chaotic condition of our modern world. "We claim that the hope of the world lies in the Church because the only hope of man lies in the love of God and the Church is that area of human life where man responds to God's love. In spite of all its failure, cowardice, and even betrayal, the Church remains the place in human life where man admits that he does not belong to himself" (Introduction, p. 16). It is one thing, however, thus to speak in general terms of the Church as being the hope of the world; but what do we mean by the Church? Unhappily there is no agreed Christian interpretation of the doctrine of the Church. That fact is

¹ Amsterdam Assembly Series, prepared under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. Four volumes, titles as above. (S.C.M. Press, 12/6 net each.)

faced in the opening essays, in which writers representative of no less than five different ecclesiastical traditions present their views: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Orthodox, and Congregational. These essays not only illustrate the differences between the churches: they reveal at the same time the large area of agreement which exists among them. This is a cause for encouragement, for the supreme significance of the World Council of Churches is that it is a means of manifesting the essential unity of the Church. It is true, as Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft points out, that the World Council is not the *Una Sancta*, but it has no other *raison d'être* than to be used for the building of the *Una Sancta*. Therefore "it may and it must claim that it is the body in which and through which, when it pleases God, a foretaste of the *Una Sancta* is given" (p. 187).

In this connection particular interest and importance attaches to the section that deals with the relations of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement. The principal essay is written by Professor Kristen Skydsgaard of Copenhagen University, who is at pains to point out that the attitude of the Roman Church is not merely the result of sectarian pride or ecclesiastical arrogance. "The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church must be explained from far deeper and more essential factors. . . . When Rome contends that the unity of the Church is not a goal lying ahead, but something which *has* already been made manifest in the Roman Catholic Church itself, because this alone is the Holy Catholic Church, and thus alone the Church of Jesus Christ, and when it further contends that true reunion can only take the form of a reintegration or reincorporation into this unity, this is not, on her part, the expression of some kind of spiritual imperialism, but the expression of a particular conception of the nature of the Church and its unity" (p. 157). But Professor Skydsgaard rejects the obvious implication that between the Church of Rome and the ecumenical movement there can be no connection or co-operation of any kind. He distinguishes between the official attitude of Rome as expressed in papal decrees and the private opinion and enterprise of certain Catholic individuals and groups; and he feels that in this latter direction there is ground for hope—that something new is emerging. "Therefore the result must be that even here on the most difficult front, where apparently irrefutable reasons speak against it, an ecumenical activity is at work—perhaps in a way different from that manifest in other places, but equally important" (pp. 167-8).

The second volume is concerned with the subject of Evangelism, which Dr. Kraemer in the opening essay defines as "the proclamation of the Gospel to all men, in all lands, in all situations and civilizations, in all conditions and circumstances, and in all spheres of life; witnessing to God's redemptive order in Jesus Christ, by word and deed, in the situation of the revolutionary world of to-day" (p. 14). Such a world task can be attempted only by a world Church, and it is here that the W.C.C. will find its practical expression. "The problem of the Church's world mission is the crisis of the ecumenical movement. If an ecumenical movement is not primarily a strategy of world-wide evangelism, then it is nothing but an interesting academic exercise" (p. 116).

There is an excellent chapter in this volume by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin on "The Duty and Authority of the Church to preach the Gospel". He shows that the duty and authority in question are inherent in the very nature of the Gospel, which he re-examines and defines under five heads—Creation, Fall, Election, Redemption, and Consummation. The essays that immediately follow survey the modern background of the evangelistic task, with special reference to the rival secular faiths of our time. The relevance of the Gospel to the present day is discussed by Professor Walter Horton, who emphasises the necessity of relating the perennial affirmations of the Christian Faith to the actual conditions and the felt needs of the present generation. "Because God has made man in His own image, we know that we can count on the fact that there *is* some correspondence between man's need and Divine Grace" (p. 89). He shows that in our own time this correspondence clearly exists at four points: (1) between the universal longing for security, and faith in God the Father Almighty; (2) between the world-wide hunger for peace and fellowship, and faith in Christ the Reconciler; (3) between the general weariness and mental lassitude of the age, and the inward refreshment and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit; and (4) between the despairing hope of the world, and the Christian hope of the everlasting Kingdom.

There is a long section in this second volume entitled "The Gospel at Work in the World", providing a sort of bird's eye view of modern experiments in evangelism, with illustrations from many countries and different areas of human life. Among the matters here touched upon are: lay evangelism; mass movements; parochial evangelism; University missions; religious films; religious broadcasting; the Iona Community; Cimade; industrial chaplaincies; evangelism in the Orthodox Church; religion in German schools; evangelism in France; etc.

Volume III ("The Church and the Disorder of Society") serves to remind us that the Amsterdam Assembly was in the direct line of succession to the "Life and Work" movement as well as to "Faith and Order". Professor J. C. Bennett of Union Theological Seminary discusses the involvement of the Church herself in the social tendencies of our age which make for disorder. This arises out of the dual nature of the Church, as being at once human and divine. "One presupposition for any discussion of the relation between the Church and the social disorder is that no doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ should be allowed to obscure its weakness and its sin as a human institution or community" (p. 91). Professor Bennett deals with some of the consequences to the Church herself of this involvement, more especially in the spheres of nationalism, social divisions, and economics.

In the essay that follows, the Rev. E. C. Urwin makes plain that there are not wanting signs of an awakening of the Church to a fresh sense of social responsibility. Especially in times of stress, peril, and confusion, the voice of the Church has been heard as the prophet of social righteousness, and there are evidences in abundance that the churches are contributing to the growth of new community life. But in this matter of the Church's responsibility for the right ordering of society Dr. J. H. Oldham does well to point out that the Church's

"greatest contribution . . . is through the fulfilment of its primary function of preaching the Word and through its life as a worshipping community. It is the worship of God that is the source of all genuine renewal. It is only from His fulness that the impoverished human spirit can find fresh life" (p. 127).

As is to be expected, the subject of Christianity and communism comes in for special treatment in Volume IV, particularly in the section entitled "Christian Responsibility in our Divided World". Here two opposite viewpoints are presented. In the first paper Dr. John Foster Dulles argues for the principle of a free society—and of peaceful means of attaining such a society—as being most compatible with Christian ideals. This, of course, is diametrically opposed to the programme of the Soviet Communist Party, which asserts that the desired ends cannot be achieved except by means of force. It is here that the real conflict arises. While it can be argued that there is no irreconcilable difference between the ultimate social ends which are professedly sought by Soviet communists and by Christian citizens, there is undeniably a fundamental difference as to the *means* that should be used. "Because the Soviet party relies on means of violence, coercion, hatred, and falsehood, the good ends it seeks do not, in fact, arrive—as is usual under such circumstances" (p. 96).

The opposite point of view is put by Professor Joseph Hromadka of Prague, whose paper is in the nature of an *apologia* for the principles of communism. The basic issue of our time, he asserts, goes far beyond the categories of capitalism and socialism, liberalism and communism, even beyond the alternatives of a free society and the totalitarian state. "The whole of the civilised human race is sick, and none is justified to claim a monopoly of means and medicines for the cure of the disintegrated international order" (p. 116). But, it may be asked, are the "means and medicines" prescribed by the Soviet party consistent with the ideals of the Christian Gospel? It is true, as Professor Hromadka states, that the Church of Christ while being non-political "is not neutral in the struggle between freedom and slavery, justice and lawlessness, order and chaos, civil rights and tyranny" (p. 116). That being so, it is difficult to follow the Professor's attempts to justify the system which deliberately and unashamedly attains its ends by tyranny and violence and by a quite wanton disregard of righteousness and truth.

If Dr. Hromadka's paper is the most provocative in this volume, there are others of perhaps even greater importance bearing on the Church's approach to the international situation. The vital question of religious freedom is ably treated by Professor Frederick Nolde of Philadelphia, while the two final essays on "Christian Responsibility in a World of Power" are notable for some realistic writing by Professor Brunner and Mr. Kenneth G. Grubb. Here again and again we are up against vast and complex problems; but as Mr. Grubb remarks in his Introduction to this volume, the World Council of Churches was undoubtedly well advised to include the intractable field of international relations in its official purview, though in so doing it has raised more questions than can readily be answered, and some that can be answered only by a divine miracle in life.