

historical accidents? Or does the very difficulty of even formulating our differences to each other's satisfaction mean that the differences are reconciled by a force which eventually even Rome cannot resist?

(2) Does the lack of coincidence between our formulated differences and our 'confessional' divisions indicate that our present Church boundaries less and less correspond with the spiritual realities? If so, will the consequence be simply a re-grouping around fresh convictions which will unite old foes and part old companions? Or does it rather indicate that the old conceptions of 'confessional' unity (more articulate to-day than for centuries) are *all* being undermined by questionings going on within each of them, questionings which, inasmuch as they are prompted by Him Who is the Truth, contain the promise of a *renewal* which may come to us, to find that we have achieved unity as a by-product?

(3) Does persistence in denominational division, in spite of dogmatic reasons in fact too weak to justify it, mean that organic unity is also being prevented by reasons which we do not admit? Do such other forces which served to unite bodies containing doctrinal differences which elsewhere are made a reason for division (e.g. the forces which hold the Church of England together) afford a hint to the forces which might unite others who have not resolved their doctrinal difficulties? What are those forces—political, national, economic, psychological?—and how are they at work to-day?

(4) Does the World Council of Churches testify to an action of God, among those who acknowledge Him as Incarnate in Christ and present in the Holy Spirit, which has already done more to humble our pride than we are ready to admit and which, in ways that we cannot yet see, will raise us up again through His power? Is the World Council, fumbling and imperfect though it is, the meeting-place which we must not abandon because in it God is facing us with questions which He will not answer elsewhere?

The Amsterdam Assembly : Sections II-IV

BY THE REV. CECIL NORTHCOTT, M.A.

IT is extremely important to underline a salient fact regarding the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches. This Assembly is not just another assembly to be reported on but an experience to be entered into. The debate which began in the sections in Amsterdam was a sample of the debate which should proceed in all areas of the Church's life.

I

The second section of the Assembly dealt with the theme "The Church's Witness to God's Design". In other words, it was the missionary and evangelistic section. All the way through the discussion

of this section there was an expressed eagerness that Christian forces should now regard the whole world as a mission field. No land is Christian, all are pagan in varying degrees :

“ The Church must find its way to the places where men really live. It must penetrate the alienated world from within, and make the minds of men familiar with the elementary realities of God, of sin and of purpose in life. This can be done partly through new ventures of self-identification by Christians with the life of that world, partly through Christians making the word of the Gospel heard in the places where decisions are made that affect the lives of men. It can be done fully only if, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Church recovers the spirit of prophecy to discern the signs of the times, to see the purpose of God working in the immense movements and revolutions of the present age, and again to speak to the nations the word of God with authority.”

Quite clearly the Church has to be alive to fresh ways of evangelism. One speaker in Section II asked the very pertinent question, “ Is there any other form of conversion than personal conversion ? ” I doubt whether he got a really satisfactory answer. We talk a great deal about community evangelism, effective evangelism and the penetration of the pagan contacts of life with the Christian evangel. But how is this done unless through people ?

This brings us right up against the need for an informed and instructed laity who really are Christian on the point of their work and in the life of their neighbourhood :

“ This is the day of opportunity for the lay membership of the Church. The work of God requires that every member of the Church, ordained and lay, be an active witness. The layman has his duties in the Church in worship and stewardship. He is charged also with a task in the world outside. The most obvious sphere of witness is the home, the place in which the Church of the coming generation is to be built up. Some are called to special ministries of preaching or intercession. For most people the field of witness lies in the place where they do their daily work. The way in which they do their job or exercise their profession must be unmistakably Christian. But also they are called to bear courageously, as God gives the opportunity, that witness in word through which others are confronted with the challenge of the living Christ. Christian service is to be conceived in the widest possible terms. The variety of forms of witness is just the means by which God can make known the fulness of the Gospel as His answer to all the needs of mankind.”

Section II also said sharply to itself some of the things which Christians everywhere have been saying about the Church for many years :

“ It is a Church that has largely lost touch with the dominant realities of modern life, and still tries to meet the modern world with language and a technique that may have been appropriate two hundred years ago.

“ It is a Church that, by its failure to speak effectively on the subject of war, has appeared impotent to deal with the realities of the human situation.

“ It is a Church accused by many of having been blind to the movement of God in history, of having sided with the vested interests of society and state, and of having failed to kindle the vision and to purify the wills of men in a changing world.

“ It is a Church under suspicion in many quarters of having used its missionary enterprise to further the foreign policies of states and the imperialistic designs of the powers of the West.

“ Much in this indictment may be untrue ; but the Church is called to deep shame and penitence for its failure to manifest Jesus Christ to men as He really is. Yet the Church is still the Church of God, in which, and in which alone, He is pleased to reveal Himself and His redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ, in whom and in whom alone the renewal of man's life is possible.

“ It is a Church that is, to millions of faithful people, the place where they receive the grace of Christ and are given strength to live by the power of His victory.

“ It is a Church awaking to its great opportunity to enter as the minister of the redemption wrought by Christ into that world with which God has confronted us.”

II

Section III was called “ The Church and the Disorder of Society ”. The word “ disorder ” is the keyword. The section did not make a list of the various disorders of society, but tried to apply itself to the crisis of our time and the refusal of man to enter into God's obedience.

One of the sad facts about Section III was the lack of laymen in it. In a roll call only about twelve genuine laymen were present, and none of these came from the trade unions or industrial life of the world. In this section, too, the clash between communism and capitalism was constantly felt. :

“ Christians should ask why communism in its modern totalitarian form makes so strong an appeal to great masses of people in many parts of the world. They should recognize the hand of God in the revolt of multitudes against injustice that gives communism much of its strength. They should seek to recapture for the Church the original Christian solidarity with the world's distressed people, not to curb their aspirations towards justice, but, on the contrary, to go beyond them and direct them towards the only road which does not lead to a blank wall, obedience to God's will and His justice. Christians should realize that for many, especially for many young men and women, communism seems to stand for a vision of human equality and universal brotherhood for which they were prepared by Christian influences. Christians who are beneficiaries of capitalism should try to see the world as it appears to many who know themselves excluded from its privileges and who see in communism a means of deliverance from poverty and insecurity. All should understand that the proclamation of racial equality by communists and their support of the cause of colonial peoples makes a strong appeal to the populations of Asia and Africa and to racial minorities elsewhere. It is a great human tragedy that so much that is good in the motives and aspirations of many communists and of those

whose sympathies they win has been transformed into a force that engenders new forms of injustice and oppression, and that what is true in communist criticism should be used to give convincing power to untrustworthy propaganda."

The main points of conflict as seen between Christianity and atheistic Marxism were listed as follows :

" (1) The communist promise of what amounts to a complete redemption of man in history ; (2) the belief that a particular class by virtue of its role as the bearer of a new order is free from the sins and ambiguities that Christians believe to be characteristic of all human existence ; (3) the materialistic and deterministic teachings, however they may be qualified, that are incompatible with belief in God and with the Christian view of man as a person, made in God's image and responsible to Him ; (4) the ruthless methods of communists in dealing with their opponents ; (5) the demand of the party on its members for an exclusive and unqualified loyalty which belongs only to God, and the coercive policies of communist dictatorship in controlling every aspect of life."

Although the sections and the Assembly itself were predominantly bourgeois and middle class, there was an honest attempt to clear the Church from any anchorage to capitalism :

" The Church should make clear that there are conflicts between Christianity and capitalism. The developments of capitalism vary from country to country, and often the exploitation of the workers that was characteristic of early capitalism has been corrected in considerable measure by the influence of trade unions, social legislation and responsible management. But (1) capitalism tends to subordinate what should be the primary task of any economy—the meeting of human needs—to the economic advantages of those who have most power over its institutions. (2) It tends to produce serious inequalities. (3) It has developed a practical form of materialism in western nations in spite of their Christian background, for it has placed the greatest emphasis upon success in making money. (4) It has also kept the people of capitalist countries subject to a kind of fate which has taken the form of such social catastrophes as mass unemployment."

This was plain speaking, particularly for the large number of Americans present, and many of them in their country have had to face criticism for agreeing to such a sharp examination of the basis and aim of capitalism. As the section quite rightly said :

" The Christian churches should reject the ideologies of both communism and *laissez faire* capitalism, and should seek to draw men away from the false assumption that these extremes are the only alternatives. Each has made promises which it could not redeem. Communist ideology puts the emphasis upon economic justice, and promises that freedom will come automatically after the completion of the revolution. Capitalism puts the emphasis upon freedom, and promises that justice will follow as a by-product of free enterprise ; that, too, is an ideology which has been proved false. It is the

responsibility of Christians to seek new, creative solutions which never allow either justice or freedom to destroy the other."

III

In Section IV, "The Church and the International Disorder", there was a large measure of agreement on the analysis of the Christian situation. Once more a great Christian assembly agreed that war is contrary to the will of God :

"War as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. The part which war plays in our present international life is a sin against God and a degradation of man. We recognize that the problem of war raises especially acute issues for Christians to-day. Warfare has greatly changed. War is now total and every man and woman is called for mobilization in war service. Moreover, the immense use of air forces and the discovery of atomic and other new weapons render widespread and indiscriminate destruction inherent in the whole conduct of modern war in a sense never experienced in past conflicts. In these circumstances the tradition of a just war, requiring a just cause and the use of just means, is now challenged. Law may require the sanction of force, but when war breaks out, force is used on a scale which tends to destroy the basis on which law exists."

There was much perplexity, however, in the discussion on the question whether war can now be an act of justice. Three points of view were expressed :

"(1) There are those who hold that, even though entering a war may be a Christian's duty in particular circumstances, modern warfare, with its mass destruction, can never be an act of justice.

"(2) In the absence of impartial supranational institutions, there are those who hold that military action is the ultimate sanction of the rule of law, and that citizens must be distinctly taught that it is their duty to defend the law by force if necessary.

"(3) Others, again, refuse military service of all kinds, convinced that an absolute witness against war and for peace is for them the will of God, and they desire that the Church should speak to the same effect."

A welcome was given to the Declaration of Human Rights passed by the United Nations :

"The Church has always demanded freedom to obey God rather than men. We affirm that all men are equal in the sight of God and that the rights of men derive directly from their status as the children of God. It is presumptuous for the state to assume that it can grant or deny fundamental rights. It is for the state to embody these rights in its own legal system and to ensure their observance in practice. We believe, however, that there are no rights without duties. Man's freedom has its counterpart in man's responsibility, and each person has a responsibility towards his fellows in community.

"We are profoundly concerned by evidence from many parts of the world of flagrant violations of human rights. Both individuals and groups are subjected to persecution and discrimination

on grounds of race, colour, religion, culture or political conviction. Against such actions, whether of governments, officials, or the general public, the churches must take a firm and vigorous stand, through local action, in co-operation with churches in other lands, and through international institutions of legal order. They must work for an ever wider and deeper understanding of what are the essential human rights if men are to be free to do the will of God."

Running alongside the statements of the Amsterdam Assembly was a memorandum on the training of laymen. The statement believes that the basic problem is that of training. So many Christian people within the Church are not informed Christians and are not competent to meet the increasing tide of secularization in the world in which they live and work. The statement says :

" An acute cause of confusion in the Church is the fact that there is no clarity among its laity concerning the ethical implications of Christian faith. It is through the laity that the Church meets the problems of the world : it is through the laity that these problems will find a Christian solution. This must, however, not be a study of abstract principles, but on the contrary a very concrete grappling with problems which men are facing. Each person has his own sphere of action, and no effort should be spared to make his faith relevant to all aspects of it. Of particular need, however, is the thought of laymen in regard to family life, which everywhere is breaking down ; in regard to their daily work, to so much of which Christianity seems simply irrelevant ; in regard to civic affairs, which move increasingly on pagan levels of self-interest. It is, however, not only the comprehensiveness of this inquiry which is important, but its depth. The occurrences of daily life must ever be seen in relation to the furthest reaches of Christian faith, and the tension between the two met in its full implication."

Another element in the training of laymen is the vision of a lay apostolate.

" Knowledge of the Christian faith yields a knowledge of its missionary character ; study of ethical problems reveals at once a need for a cohesive faith for the peoples of the world. Here perhaps the passive role taken by the majority of the laity at present is most vivid, evangelism being almost exclusively regarded as the province of a few particularly zealous and frequently rather queer recipients of a special and mysterious ' call '. The history of the Church reveals that the opposite is true, that faith in Christ has spread most effectively when it is passed on by people everywhere as they come into the normal contacts with their neighbour which the day brings forth. It is, to be sure, true that there are different gifts and different types of ministry, but this does not mitigate the compulsion which the true Christian feels to share his faith with others. In the training of laymen this vision must be awakened, and clues given as to means and techniques whereby it may be followed."

The World Council of Churches itself is trying to give a lead in this matter of laymen's training through the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey

near Geneva, where Dr. Kraemer is following out his theme of "congregation building", which has been so successful in Holland, by inviting laymen for periods of study and consultation. A similar institute in this country, where educated laymen and women could gain that education in Christian truth which they have missed owing to the extreme specialisation of general education, would be a big asset to the Christian life of this country. An experiment along these lines is being conducted at the St. Katherine's College at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, which Sir Walter Moberley is to lead in the beginning of the autumn of this year. In this way some of the fruits of the Amsterdam Assembly are being made available for the life of the various churches.

It is in the realm of these three sections on which I have commented that the churches can most usefully deploy their all too meagre resources and so make the Amsterdam Message, "We intend to stay together," really practical in the common life.

Amsterdam and the Younger Churches

BY THE REV. D. T. NILES, B.A., B.D.

I

*Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace ;
For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.*

THESE words with which the conference closed are the words that come first to one's mind as one thinks of Amsterdam. There the Church happened. One more event in the life of the Church took place. It was not simply that Christians or Churches were gathered together in His name, but that in very truth He was there in the midst, and we were enabled to hear together what He had to say to us and to the world through us. It was His Salvation that we were able to proceed from the confusion of tongues with which we began, to arrive at a common message. It was also His Salvation that we were able to fit together into common statements for further study and scrutiny the immense variety of our convictions.

This quality of the Church as "event" is of determining significance for us in the younger churches. At the frontiers of our Church life, where the Church is in contact and conflict with the world, there is nothing we need more than the assurance that the Church is not only given but also promised. There is a real temptation for us to introduce into our evangelistic striving a restless seeking for results which both shortens the vision with which we plan, and increases the tension under which we work.

The human situation at Amsterdam in which the divine event took place was the conversation conducted there between the Churches. But when the younger churches entered into this conversation they