

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

soon became aware of one thing. They discovered that the general pattern of the conversation was already set. It was set by the fact of a common history shared by the peoples of the west: common, because dominated by the same source events. This history of the western world is a history into which the lands of the younger churches also enter. They enter into it as Churches, for as Churches they are largely the result of and have been conditioned by the nature of the missionary enterprise of the Churches of the west. They also enter into it as countries, for in almost all of them the history of the last hundred years or more has been determined by western penetration. Thus the younger churches find, on the one hand, that the pattern of the conversation between the Churches into which they enter is a pattern that has relevance for them; while, on the other hand, they often find themselves emotionally set against making their contribution within that pattern. It is true that many of the leaders of the younger churches are at home in this western-history-dominated pattern of thought, but their emotional reaction from it also sometimes finds expression. There is, however, little disposition in the ecumenical forum to take emotional trends seriously when preparing reports. It is the logic of ideas that tell. The reports of all ecumenical conferences, including Amsterdam, bear the marks of this problem.

## II

*The nations shall walk amidst the light thereof ;  
And the glory and the honour of the nations shall they bring into it.*

The problem mentioned in the previous paragraph is nevertheless not due to any reluctance on the part of the ecumenical movement to take the "nations" seriously. Indeed, it is one of the special features of the ecumenical movement that it holds in creative tension the reality of the Church as supra-national and universal, with the reality of each Church as a Church for the nation. The solution of the non-Scriptural fact of denominational Churches lies in taking both truths seriously. When I think of the future into which God is leading His Church, I realize that my loyalty as a Methodist in Ceylon is first to my fellow-Christians in Ceylon, and only then to my fellow-Methodists throughout the world. But I realize also that it is only as I maintain loyalty to my fellow-Methodists throughout the world, that I shall be able to express my Christianity in Ceylon in supra-national terms. There is a tension here which Amsterdam taught us more clearly to see.

But just because this tension is so constitutive of the nature of the Church as God's instrument in the world, it is necessary that larger attention be paid to the "nations" in ecumenical meetings. An ecumenical conference must justify itself not only by being able to shed more light on the nature of the Church, but also by being able to help the Church in each nation to understand its tasks in that nation. Reports which deal generally with the task of the Church in the world, normally deal with the task of the Church in the west, and in the rest of the world as it is related to the west. Qualifying clauses and exceptive paragraphs are introduced into such reports to make them relevant to the lands of the younger churches, but while these additions do make

the reports acceptable in ecumenical assemblies they do not make them immediately relevant to the younger churches concerned.

In this whole matter, we of the younger churches ourselves are singularly unhelpful. We are unprepared. If history is under God's control, and nations are units in God's design, and the end of history is the bringing of the treasures of the nations into Zion, then it is urgent that the Church in each nation should seek to understand the history of that nation in terms of this determining perspective. It is when the representatives of the younger churches are able to speak out of such an understanding, that they will be able both to change the pattern of ecumenical discussion, and truly to help in the drafting of ecumenical reports.

A small detail in the technique of discussion followed in ecumenical conferences will also have to be watched ; for where in an ecumenical group the younger church delegates are few in number, the time guillotine applied to speakers in a discussion can work unfairly with respect to the younger church delegation as a whole. Besides, they have the task in discussion very often not only of making their points but also of sketching the background against which the points made assume their full meaning.

### III

*Ourselves, your servants, for Jesus' sake :  
But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.*

Just as one of the foci in the relationships between the younger and the older churches is the relationship between their several countries, the other foci is the relationship between the Churches themselves within the missionary movement. It is the fruitfulness of this relationship which contributes so largely to the ecumenical movement. Amsterdam revealed how closely dependent on each other these two movements are. But by this very fact arises also the necessity to press forward certain considerations which seem important if the missionary links between the Churches are to be forged together with the ecumenical links to form one chain.

First of all, Missionary Societies and the Churches they support must seek to reduce the time-lag between the policies laid down by the meetings of the International Missionary Council and the policies actually followed in missionary work. It was by 1948 that Tambaram was beginning to be taken seriously, but we cannot wait till 1958 for Whitby to take effect. This time-lag will be shortened if, among other things, the Missionary Societies will take account of national developments in the countries which they serve. It is not a question of seeing how missionary work can be carried on in changing national conditions, but of seeing how missionary work can be related creatively to national developments. Missionary Societies too must take the nation seriously. God is dealing with the nations as well as with the Church. It may be worth making also a minor point in this connection, and that is to ask why, when missionary policies are reviewed with respect to any mission field, those who take part in the discussions are only the representatives of the Missionary Society and the younger church concerned? Why are not the services of leaders from another Missionary Society or

from another younger church enlisted? What, in this matter, as well as in many other similar questions, are the implications of the founding of the World Council of Churches?

Secondly, immediate attention must be given to liquidating anomalies. The justification of an anomaly is always a special local situation; but we must beware lest the anomaly tends to justify or prolong that situation. Racial churches are the easiest examples to give of what we mean by an anomaly; but in some ways a more important example is the existence of Christian institutions in the lands of the younger churches which are controlled by Missionary Societies rather than by the younger churches themselves to which these Societies are related. This is true even in places like India where missionary policy is reckoned to be very advanced.

Thirdly, the Missionary Societies must ask themselves the question whether their policies do not need radical alteration in view of the Church Union movement. Speaking as a Methodist, for instance, I should like to raise with the Methodist Missionary Society the question whether one implication of the direction in which the Church Union movement is progressing is not that the Methodist Missionary Society should seek to make the Historic Episcopate a part of the structure of the Churches of its founding. This may be difficult in long established Methodist Churches, but should not be impossible where the Churches are young and Methodistically undeveloped. Missionary Societies like the Church Missionary Society and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, on the other hand, must ask themselves such questions as what the policy with respect to Intercommunion is to be in the Churches of their founding.

All in all, what the younger churches need is to have the missionary movement with its organisation so related to the World Council of Churches as to share fully in the results of the conversation taking place there between all the Churches. At present the missionary movement is organised too much in a series of circles, each self-contained. There is organisational arrangement to have these circles intersect, but they remain circles nevertheless. Amsterdam hardly faced this question of correlation between the missionary movement and the ecumenical movement.

#### IV

*To preach the untrackable riches of Christ ;  
And to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in  
God.*

The subject of Church Union has already been introduced, but it certainly needs separate mention for it represents one of the dynamic forces in the younger churches to-day. Indeed, it is one of the main movements of our time, though many in the ecumenical movement are not at home with it. It seems to them to be one of those things which God is doing, but in ways which they are unable to fit into their picture of how God works. When Paul talks of the untrackable riches of God this is what he probably means, that God does not always keep to the highways but often goes down the bypaths of history in seeking to fulfil His will. Those who have worked in the field of Church Union

know something of this unexpectedness of God, but it is disconcerting to the tidy student of Church history. Anomalies are his chief despair, but anomalies are exactly what Paul has in mind when he talks about the untrackable riches of Christ. The Churches of the west, on the whole, are more concerned about Intercommunion than Union. For them "Christendom" is still a sufficient reality. They do not understand the soul-hunger of many of us in the younger churches for organic church union in our countries, and are afraid lest what we do creates anomalies for them.

The younger churches look to the World Council of Churches as a place where there can be real conversation between the older and the younger churches on this subject. Also, since so few of the younger churches can become members of the World Council of Churches, as they are not autonomous, the question may have to be raised as to whether sooner or later we shall not find it necessary to constitute a Council of Younger Churches which will work in correlation with the World Council of Churches. The International Missionary Council has paved the way for some such new beginning. For the immediate present perhaps the National Christian Councils can be so re-orientated as to take the edge off this problem; but we should not forget that in a National Christian Council a Church is not expected to and cannot function as a Church. The National Christian Councils are not concerned and cannot be concerned with the Churches in their wholeness. But it is just that concern which is the concern of the World Council of Churches. The present relationships being worked out between the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches must therefore safeguard both the concerns of the National Christian Councils as Councils, and the concerns of the younger churches as Churches. If these relationships are made too tidy, and tend to create National Christian Council monopolies in the lands of the younger churches, then we may have solved our administrative problems but shall have been untrue to the dynamic possibilities of the present situation.

## V

*He came to His own home,  
And His own people received Him not.*

But why? Because they were defending their home and His against Him. When God's light becomes our enlightenment, then perforce we must safeguard our enlightenment against His further light. When God's truth becomes our Church Confession, then perforce we must safeguard that Confession against His further truth. When God's dealing with us becomes our heritage, then perforce we must safeguard that heritage against God's further action. He came unto His own and His own received Him not, because they were His own. In attempting to be true to God's past they betrayed God's future.

The formation of the World Council of Churches inevitably does one thing. It makes each church that belongs to it see that it is but one church among many. It makes clear the fact that the Church is divided. It points the churches beyond themselves to the Church. The younger churches are at home with this perspective. Their eyes

are naturally fixed on the future event. That is why they are impatient when they feel that in discussions on ecumenical policy with regard to Worship, for instance, the past of the Churches is allowed largely to determine what may or may not be done. It is precisely because the past is so important that the Churches must realize the importance of the future too. The risks of faith must be taken if we would inherit the promised land.

The spiritual freedom, against the absence of which the verse we have considered from St. John gives warning, is a freedom which it is essential also to maintain in the administration of the World Council of Churches. It is no small gain that many of those in charge of the administration of the World Council were trained in the Student Christian Movement. One of the peculiarities of this Movement is its "person to person" type of administration. It is the exact opposite of bureaucracy. It seeks not to fit persons into a machine but to help persons to express their peculiar vocation and particular talents. It is concerned less with bottlenecks of authority and more with the goals in view. It does not ask, "Who is the person who will expect to hold this position?", but "Who is best suited to hold it?" The World Council of Churches inherits this tradition, and on the ability of the World Council staff to maintain this tradition in their work will depend whether the Churches in the World Council will bend their energies to guard their homes or to receive their Lord.

This is perhaps the best place at which to introduce also another point which is relevant when we are considering the future into which the Churches must enter. The report of the first commission at Amsterdam mentioned two clusters of ideas with respect to the nature of the Church: the Catholic, with its insistence on the continuity of the Church in time and space, and on the reality of the authority committed to it by Christ; and the Protestant, with its emphasis on the free sovereignty of God and the implications of that freedom for our understanding of the nature of God's dealings with His Church throughout history. But surely there is a third cluster of ideas which can legitimately be called Puritan, in which the determining question is the nature of the witness of the Christian community as a peculiar people. The present tendency in ecumenical discussion is to discount this point of view by calling it pietistic, but one feels convinced that the future direction of the conversation between the Churches will be truly set only when this third emphasis is acknowledged and the conversation becomes a triangular one. The Puritan strain is an important one in the life of the younger churches.

## VI

*Time passes, but no vision comes to anything!  
The time is coming for the truth of every vision.*

The Christian enterprise is a forward looking enterprise, but the light by which it sees its road is not the light of the torch which it holds in its hand: it is the light of the sun which is rising behind the hills towards which it is moving. The light by which we walk is the light of the future event. One of the distinguishing marks of Amsterdam

was that there the Hope of the Christian became a determining category in all our thinking. To many from the younger churches this was a great experience. Struggling against odds, they knew the strain of the forces pressing in upon them. But here was release, not from work but from strain, not from struggle but from despair.

In the last conversation that I had with Dr. Visser 't Hooft before I left Europe, I asked him, "How do you feel as you face your new tasks?" He answered immediately, "Niles, we must make sure that we do not decide that we shall succeed. If we decide to succeed then we may succeed without succeeding in God's way. But if we go on from day to day seeking to do His will, then we shall be prepared to receive success from Him if He wills it; and if He does not, then humbly to say—It is God's decision that David shall not build the temple, but He will raise up Solomon." (These may not be the exact words he spoke, but they are as accurate as I remember them.) In these words of Dr. 't Hooft lies the heart of the question as we face the future. Obedience is ours to render. Success is His to command.

Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables,  
that he may run that readeth it.

For the vision is yet for the appointed time,  
and it hasteth toward the end and shall not lie.

Though it tarry, wait for it;  
because it will surely come, it will not delay.

---

## The Report of the First Assembly

BY THE REV. CANON R. W. HOWARD, M.A.

**E**XCEPT for the privileged few who were present, as members, "alternatives" or accredited visitors, it has been difficult to form a clear picture of the work of the First Assembly at Amsterdam, last August, of the World Council of Churches. Though the church press did its best, at the time and afterwards, one could scarcely see the wood for the trees.

And yet it is important for all Christian leaders, clerical or lay, and all who have ecumenical union at heart, clearly to grasp in its main outline, at least, the significance of this unique event in Christian history. This it is now possible for them to do, by means of the careful and illuminating report recently published.<sup>1</sup> Here we have before us the structure of the Council, the record of the meetings held at its first Assembly, its constitution and committees, and everything else which may help us to form for ourselves and to convey to others, an intelligent idea of "what it is all about". And unless the average Christian everywhere plays his part, the World Council and its work will either sink to the level of a pious abstraction and be contemned,

<sup>1</sup> *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches: The Official Report.* Edited by W. A. Visser 't Hooft. S.C.M. Press. 12/6.