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.

EXCEPT 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.[1] 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,

[1] *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.

or be feared as yet another example of the dead hand of bureaucracy. It is neither of these. The "Message of the Assembly," which opens this book, declares that "our coming together to form a World Council will be vain unless Christians and Christian congregations everywhere commit themselves to the Lord of the Church in a new effort to seek together, where they live, to be His witnesses and servants among their neighbours." It must surely bring great inspiration to all Christians and to all Christian congregations—especially to those that feel themselves small, weak, or persecuted—to know that they are units now in a mighty host, no longer separate or isolated but brought together by the love of Christ and by the call of Christ for deeper worship, thought and action than they can ever hope to achieve by themselves.

I

How has this World Council come about? The answer is clearly given here.

> "The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Amsterdam, August 22nd—September 4th, was the climax of a long development. The historical influences which have brought it into being have been many, some of them reaching back for more than a century. But the 'ecumenical movement' as we know it to-day is the fruition of the prayers and efforts of a single generation. More particularly, the World Council of Churches is the confluence of three streams which have poured their contributions into a central channel. These three are (1) the missionary movement, which has made the Church a world-wide community; (2) the "Life and Work" movement, which has brought the churches together in their attempts to make Christianity more effective in its relation to society; and (3) the "Faith and Order" movement, which has explored the differences in basic Christian conviction that must be reconciled if the unity of the Church as one visible Body of Christ is to be attained."
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> "If a single date were to be selected as the beginning of the organisational ancestry of the World Council of Churches it would doubtless be 1910. This was the year of the great missionary conference in Edinburgh, which during the next decade led to the formation of a network of interdenominational councils in more than a score of countries."

Edinburgh (1910), Stockholm (1925), Jerusalem (1928), Oxford and Edinburgh (1937), Madras (1938)—these are some of the milestones on the road to Amsterdam (1948). Let it never be forgotten that the World Council was born and cherished in the missionary expansion of the Church. That fact was symbolised in the processions of the Assembly's opening day (Sunday, August 22nd), here vividly described:

> "The service began with a procession of delegates in national costume and official garb. Sober black was on the whole predominant, but there were academic hoods of many colours and brilliant splashes of red, purple, orange and gleaming white, especially among

the Eastern churchmen. There were bare heads, turbaned heads, velvet caps and birettas; the faces of all the races of mankind; ruffled collars on Scandinavian ecclesiastics, making them look like Rembrandt portraits; full beards and high black headdresses distinguishing the Eastern Orthodox; round collars, Geneva bands, pectoral crosses, and many other insignia of office from different lands and different churches.

"It took nearly twenty minutes for the procession to make its way around the church and for the delegates to be seated."

Symbolic, too, were the leaders of that opening service: Dr. Gravemeyer, of the Dutch Reformed Church, which had been so grievous a sufferer in the war; our own Archbishop of Canterbury; John R. Mott, prince, pioneer, and now patriarch of the movement towards unity through missions—"whose hand could not restrain itself from conducting the music of the hymn ('A toi la gloire') which was being sung as he reached the pulpit", and the Rev. D. T. Niles, a young Methodist leader from Ceylon, who preached the sermon—"a remarkable utterance, incisive, theological, hopeful, built on the text, 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?' (Ex. iii. 11)". How, he asked, can the Church to-day confront the modern world, with its hard heart; or rather, confront the *people*? Only in the strength of Christ.

"He says to us, 'The power you will show is the power of the leaven which I have already hid, the harvest you will reap is the harvest of the seed which I have already sown, the passions you will rouse are the passions of the fire which I have already kindled, the love you will share is the love of the deed which I have already done, and the end you will proclaim is the end of the work which I have already accomplished.'"

This opening act of worship was part of a general scheme of worship which had been carefully prepared. It fell into two main types: worship arranged as part of the Assembly itself; worship arranged by the authorities of the Church represented at the conference. In the first category came the opening and closing services, the service (open to all denominations) of *preparation* for Holy Communion, and the daily worship at the beginning and end of each day's work. These daily services provided a representative range of liturgical expressions.

The Assembly itself did not hold services of Holy Communion. But arrangements had been made that each member of the Assembly might participate as a communicant in a service of Holy Communion; and that each member might attend—if he wished, without participating in—the Eucharistic worship conducted under other traditions than in his own.

As a generous gesture, the Netherlands Reformed Church invited all who were baptised communicant members in their own church to partake in their closing Celebration on August 29. 1,200 accepted this invitation. "Ten ministers from different countries and different confessions sat in turn at the Communion Table and spoke the words of institution as each group of communicants came forward. It was an impressive service expressing the fellowship of the Church at its deepest level. For two and a half hours, the representatives of the

churches and nations moved in groups of one hundred to find their places at the Lord's Table. There were men and women from all corners of the world, of all races. There were archbishops and laymen, youth delegates and aged church leaders. They came and at the Table each passed the bread and then the chalice to his neighbour."

The Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox Communions were held separately, though (normally non-partaking, attendance by others was welcomed) many non-Lutherans, however, did receive communion at the Lutheran service.

II

The first main section of the Report deals with the Plenary Sessions of the Assembly, at which the main themes were unfolded. Selected passages only from the speeches are given. Outstanding among these is the description given, during the first evening's discussion of the theme : " How God has led us ", by the General Secretary, Dr. Visser 't Hooft, of the present status of the World Council as something unprecedented in Church history. He defined its function as follows :

> " What then is the true function of our Council ? Our name gives us the clue to an answer. We are a Council of Churches, not *the* Council of the one undivided Church. Our name indicates our weakness and our shame before God, for there can be and there *is* finally only one Church of Christ on earth. Our plurality is a deep anomaly. But our name indicates also that we are aware of that situation, that we do not accept it passively, that we would move forward towards the manifestation of the One Holy Church. Our Council represents therefore an emergency solution—a stage on the road—a body living between the time of complete isolation of the churches from each other and the time—on earth or in heaven—when it will be visibly true that there is one Shepherd and one flock.
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> " The functions of the Council follow from this situation. We are a fellowship in which the churches after a long period of ignoring each other come to know each other. We are a fellowship in which the churches enter into serious and dynamic conversation with each other about their differences in faith, in message, in order. We are a fellowship in which Christian solidarity is practised, so that the churches aid their weak or needy sister-churches. We are a fellowship in which common witness is rendered to the Lordship of Christ in all matters in which a common word for the churches and for the world is given to us. We are above all a fellowship which seeks to express that unity in Christ already given to us and to prepare the way for a much fuller and much deeper expression of that unity."

The main body of the Report is concerned with the four ' Sections ', on which preparatory study had been concentrated for two years. On each of the four subjects a book—in the form of a symposium—had been produced and was in the hands of the delegates by May, 1948. Four Commissions had prepared the relevant Reports. These were discussed at the Assembly ; and an outline of the discussions is given in this book, together with the final version of each of the four reports, as amended after discussion. It is, of course, impossible in this article

to make more than a very brief mention of the nature and substance of each report.

As will be expected, the deepest differences between the Churches were revealed in the discussion and report on " The Universal Church in God's Design ". All are agreed that " God has given to His people in Jesus Christ a unity which is His creation and not our achievement "; that " God's redeeming activity in the world has been carried out through His calling a People to be His own chosen People." The Old Covenant is fulfilled in the Church, indwelt by the Holy Ghost. But as to the *nature* of that Church, and its *mission*, there are deep disagreements of view between Christians. These are clearly faced and expounded in the Report; the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' may perhaps best describe them. But, " although we cannot fully meet, our Lord will not allow us to turn away from each other . . . we discover disagreements which are to be traced back into our different ways of understanding the whole; and, beneath those disagreements, we find again an agreement in a unity which drew us together, and will not let us go. . . . Although genuine convictions and loyalty to truth itself have their part in the making and perpetuating of divisions, we confess that pride, self-will and lovelessness have also played their part and still do so. . . . We also have much to gain from the encounter of the old-established Christian traditions with the vigorous, growing churches whose own traditions are still being formed. We bring these and all other differences between us into the World Council of Churches in order that we may face them together. . . . We cannot rest content with our present divisions. . . . There is but one Lord and one Body."

The next section deals with " The Church's Witness to God's Design ", and is specially devoted to the Church's duty of evangelism and missionary service.

The third Section, on " The Church and the Disorder of Society ", faces the dangers which arise from vast concentrations of power, and the domination of man by technics. It is frankly recognised that the Church, by its failure to speak to man's social conscience, is partly to blame for the secularisation of society. The good and evil points in Communism and in capitalism are searchingly analysed; and the Church's right attitude to both and to politics generally is indicated.

The report of the fourth section, on " The Church and the International Disorder ", seeks to lay bare the causes of war, and claims the rights of freedom for all men.

III

Four Committees dealt with special " concerns ": " The Life and Work of Women in the Church "; " The Christian Approach to the Jews "; " The Significance of the Laity in the Church "; and " Christian Reconstruction and Inter-Church aid ". On all these subjects Christian leaders will here find much to illuminate and challenge them: particularly, perhaps, in the report on the Laity.

Chapter VIII presents the findings of the vigorous Youth Conference simultaneously held, to discuss the four main 'Section' subjects. There are frank and outspoken criticisms of the churches: a demand

for more theology, less class privilege, language more relevant and meaningful; more use of the laity; a more honest recognition of the sinfulness of war. One admirable *bon mot* must be repeated: "The times demand a forward movement of the *whole* Church, knowing that the vanguard of the attack must be Christian youth, who, at any rate, are in closest contact with other young people. The vanguard indeed, for we know that behind us are the prayers and guidance of our elders. When the constitution of the Youth Department was in process of debate here someone stated that youth could be the explosive element in the Church. Very true. But we are reminded of the words of a sage Bishop who, when called a 'back number', retorted, 'Yes, I am a back number. But, remember, you take back numbers to light the fire.' In the wintry cold of the present day unfaith, the Pentecostal fire for which the Church is expectant can only come when we actively recognise each other as fellow-witnesses in God's design."

A careful account of the Constitution of the World Council, and its rules, closes the main part of the book. The Constitution comprises: an Assembly meeting every five years; a Central Committee; and Commissions (e.g. on Faith and Order, and International Affairs). Appendices give lists of all who were members, "alternates," accredited visitors, consultants and youth delegates.

Clergy who buy this Report will find here much material for sermons and discussion groups: e.g. on the work of the Church, the use and responsibility of the laity, evangelism, Communism. It is to be hoped that the subject of worship will loom larger in the next Assembly.

The index is not complete: "Communism," "Capitalism," "Bible," "Witness," "Kingdom of God," find no place in it, though these subjects are among the many on which fresh light is thrown.

Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

By The Rev. F. J. Taylor, M.A.

ROME AND AMSTERDAM

It is a matter of common knowledge that Rome refuses to be associated with the World Council of Churches, for such association would have the appearance of a tacit admission that she is one among a number of churches and not the one true Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which she believes herself to be. But individual Roman priests and leading laymen have shown considerable sympathy with the ecumenical movement, and numbers of them desired to be present at Amsterdam as observers. The general secretariat of the World Council issued the necessary invitations, but the Holy See ruled that these invitations could not be accepted without its permission, which it refused to grant to any Roman Catholic. This refusal caused considerable surprise and some distress in Roman Catholic circles and had