



The Mission And Unity Of The Church

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PREFATORY NOTE

The Peter Ainslie Memorial Lecture, which is delivered annually at one of the English-Medium South African universities, exists to promote Christian unity. The donors of the fund, the Disciples of Christ, desire it to commemorate Dr. Peter Ainslie, a distinguished oecumenist in his day, and minister of their leading congregation at Baltimore, Maryland.

THE MISSION AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The eleventh Peter Ainslie Memorial lecture delivered at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, on the 17th October 1960 by the Right Reverend Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, late of the Church of South India.

I WISH TO BEGIN by expressing my appreciation of the honour which has been done to me by the authorities of this University in inviting, me to give the Peter Ainslie Memorial Lecture, especially in this 50th anniversary of the foundation by Dr. Peter Ainslie of the Council on Christian Unity which, I understand, supports this lectureship. I should like to express my sense of indebtedness for all the labours of that Council, and of the Disciples of Christ generally, for their tireless labour on behalf of the unity of Christendom.

I have chosen for my subject the mission and unity of the Church. Inevitably I speak from the particular angle of one who has worked for many years as a missionary in India, who has had the privilege of being a minister in the Church of South India and participating in that wonderful experience of unity, and who is now serving an ecumenical organization devoted to the strengthening of the missionary cause. While I hope that thoughts projected from that particular angle may perhaps illuminate at certain points matters which are familiar to you. I realize also that my limited experience prevents me from seeing much that you see, and I ask in advance for your pardon for these inevitable limitations.

Our concern will be with the missionary task of the Church in the world - seen as one whole. And I begin by reminding you very briefly of the fact that this task must now be conceived in terms very different from those in which it was conceived in the days of the missionary pioneers 150 years ago. And this, not because of any change in the content of the task, but because the world in which it has to be discharged has changed so profoundly.

Let me attempt to suggest three respects in which this is true:

1. The missionary movement as we know it to-day took its rise, and developed its characteristic forms and ideas, in a time when the currents of world power were running strongly from the countries

of the white races into the rest of the world. It was a time when it was taken for granted in most of the world which had any chance to know the facts, that the initiative in world affairs and the responsibility for their general direction, lay in the hands of the white races. That era has now ended. It is a fact, whether we rejoice in it or regret it, that for the great majority of the human race to-day the most important fact of the present age is not the conquest of interstellar space, not the so-called east-west conflict, but the ending of the period of world history dominated by the white races of western Europe and their off-shoots. The effects of this in the political sphere are too well-known to need enumerating. It is less commonly realised that the same is true in the field of culture, morals, and religion. Here you will permit me to speak out of 23 years' experience of living in India. There no one can possibly doubt that - to use K.M. Panikkar's phrase - the Vasco da Gama era has ended. The period in which the great non-Christian religious cultures were passive in relation to the penetration of the Christian west has ended. They have passed over to the counter-attack. Their ablest representatives are confident that they have taken the measure both of western culture and morals, and of the Christian religion, and that they have little further to fear or to learn from that quarter. In the field of religion, the modern educated Hindu feels that the world is his. He knows himself perfectly competent for the mastery of the whole technique and culture of the west, and plunges freely into the stream of modern science and technology without the slightest fear that by so doing he is loosening his spiritual moorings in the old faith. He is confident that he has in the Vedanta the ultimate truth within which all other truths are enclosed. He appreciates the good in Christianity, but at the same time he is confident that Christianity is only one of the many local and transitory attempts to express in human terms the inexpressible truth which is finally and securely embodied in the mystical and metaphysical traditions of India. And he naturally regards the preaching of the Christian missionary as a deplorable attempt to claim absolute truth for a relative approximation to the truth, and in fact as merely a survival from the colonial era which can be safely tolerated simply because it is bound to be totally ineffective. In the sphere of morals the position is the same. The period in which the white races, inspired by Christianity, claimed a moral leadership in the world is, so far as he is concerned, ended. I wonder how far we of the white races realize how completely our civilization has now discredited itself before the world. Our frightful wars, our atomic bombs, and the



lamentable moral standards which we display to the rest of the world are together sufficient to make it certain that the claim to moral leadership which was taken seriously by Asians and Africans a century ago, will to-day be simply laughed out of court. It is unnecessary to say more. If one wants documentation for the ending of the period of the moral leadership of the white races, one has only to read the records of the current proceedings of the General Assembly of the United Nations. This fact has obviously profound bearings upon our subject. The missionaries of the 19th century who went out for the most part from the lands of the white races to the lands of Asia, Africa and the Pacific, were going - so to say - with the current of the world power. They were the representatives of the race which had leadership in secular affairs. They brought, with the Gospel, the education, the technique of healing and production, and the financial power which were beginning to exercise the predominant influence in the world. Their methods of work were profoundly influenced by this fact. They founded great institutions and developed programmes of work directed to uplifting the general life of the communities in which they worked and enabling them to share in the benefits of the civilization which had been developed in the West. Now that the tides of world power have changed, missions find themselves in a new situation, a situation much nearer to that of St. Paul and his fellow apostles, than to that of the 19th century. Having developed patterns of work adapted to the business of going with the current of secular power, we now face the necessity of learning how to move in the opposite direction to them. It is a profoundly difficult change to make.

2. The second new fact is paradoxically related to the first. It is that, nevertheless, we are now witnessing for the first time the emergence of a world civilization, covering the whole globe and drawing all races into it, a civilization which is based upon the science, the technology and the commercial and political ideas developed in the western world. The development of systems of communication has reached a point at which almost every inhabited part of the earth's surface is within easy reach of every other. To a degree previously unknown, the whole human community throughout the world is now interrelated and interdependent. And the techniques for this new civilization have been developed in the lands of the old western Christendom. Yet they are now no longer regarded as peculiarly western. They are regarded as properly the property of all men.

Newly independent countries, which are seeking to free themselves



from the former cultural influence of the west, are at the same time compelled to go to the west for help in developing the techniques upon which participation in the modern world civilization depends. This is a universal phenomenon, and transcends the much publicized division of the world between the communist and non-communist powers. Because it is universal it gets less attention than it deserves. It is, nevertheless, one of the decisive new facts of our time.

3. The third new fact which changes the circumstances of the missionary task to-day is the rise of the younger churches to positions of maturity and authority. The existence of a great family of churches in all parts of Asia, Africa, the Islands of the Pacific and Latin America, is the fruit of the missionary labours of the past 200 years. We have been slow to recognize all the implications of their existence, but it is now generally accepted that theological seriousness requires us to acknowledge that their existence invalidates much of the traditional pattern of 19th century western missions. If - as we must - we acknowledge the younger church as simply the Body of Christ in the place where it is set, then it becomes impossible any longer to conceive of the missionary task as something directed from a base in Europe or America. The centre of the operation is there, in the Church which God has placed there. The missionary has an essentially

auxiliary relationship to the task. This means that there is (as Walter Freytag so vividly put it at the Ghana Assembly) a "lost directness" in the missionary task. It is no longer in quite the old sense a straightforward matter of going out from Christendom to Heathendom. The missionary must place himself at the disposal of that body which God has already placed in the midst of Heathendom to be His appointed agent and witness. And the question at once arises: "Is the missionary to-day an asset or a liability to the younger church?" He may bring many valuable gifts, but in many situations his foreign-ness, his imperfect understanding of the language and culture of the people, and his obvious connection with the former colonial power, may make him a real liability. Who can fail to detect the aroma of colonialism which still tends to hang about a mission compound even when the colonial era has ended in the political sphere? And who can be surprised if many young missionaries, including precisely the most able and alert and spiritually sensitive, are uncertain whether they are in the right place?

These three facts - the reversal of the tides of power, the appearance of a single world civilization and the rise of the younger churches - add up to a change so profound that the whole foreign mis-

sionary enterprise appears to many people - both in East and in West - as something of an anachronism. The phrase "The age of missions has ended", which was first used (I believe) by Dr. Max Warren at Willingen in 1952, is repeated with a quite different meaning from that in which he used it, for Dr. Warren is still the Director of a great missionary society. Sometimes the phrase appears in the following formulation: "The age of missions has been succeeded by the age of Inter-Church Aid." There is a sense in which this phrase can be rightly used; firstly, it directs attention to the immensely important fact that (under the leadership of the World Council of Churches) our age has begun to rediscover the New Testament sense of the solidarity of the Churches with one another in all their needs. The rediscovery of the fact that this mutual sharing is not merely a matter for occasional emergencies, but something rooted in the nature of the Church itself, does mark the beginning of a new era in the life of the churches. Secondly, it indicates a change which is needed in the pattern of the missionary enterprise so as to give full weight to the essential place of the younger churches in the missionary task. Nevertheless as it stands the phrase is both absurd and dangerous. It is absurd, because while a very large proportion of the world's population remains almost completely out of touch with the Gospel it is absurd to say that the age of missions has ended. It is dangerous because it is precisely this message which Christendom would like to hear. I do not think that we reflect sufficiently upon the fact that, even after 200 years of foreign missions, the foreign missionary task remains strictly peripheral in the consciousness of western Christendom. We have to face the fact that the fundamental structure of our churchmanship was created during that 1,000 year period when Christendom was not expanding but contracting, when - sealed off from contact with the greater part of the world's people by the power of Islam - the Church lived in almost total isolation from the non-Christian cultures. In this situation, the illusion that the age of missions is over became almost an integral part of Christianity. The perpetuation of that illusion is revealed in our normal church life, in the forms of our congregations and parishes, in our conception of the ministry, and in the ordinary consciousness of churchmen. Even our theological curricula bear eloquent testimony to this illusion. Our church history is normally taught not as the story of the triumphs of the Gospel; but as the story of the internal quarrels of the Church; our systems of dogmatics are not directed towards the non-Christian systems of thought, but against rival statements of the Christian faith. The

training of the ministry is not for a mission to the world, but almost exclusively for the pastoral care of established Christian congregations. After this relatively brief period in which, along with the cultural and political expansion of western Europe, there has been a recovery of the sense of responsibility for world mission, it would be extremely easy to fall back again into Christendom's 1000-year slumber with the slogan "The age of missions is over".

But if that phrase is sometimes understood in a sense which is absurd and dangerous, it remains true that we face a situation so profoundly different from that in which modern missions took their rise and developed their characteristic shape that we are required to undertake a most thorough and searching examination of the whole operation, both in respect of its pattern and in respect of its fundamental meaning and purpose. About the pattern of missions I do not propose here to speak; about the theological basis and meaning of missions I venture to share with you some thoughts about the present phase of the discussion. I take as a convenient starting point the debate on the subject at the world missionary conference held at Willingen in 1952. This meeting was convened primarily to discuss the theological basis and meaning of the missionary task, but it ended without being able to reach agreement on the main questions at issue. The conference declined to accept the report of the theological commission working on the subject. The crucial debates centred round two closely related points - the place of the Church in the statement of the basis of missions, and the sufficiency of a Christological, as distinct from a Trinitarian, statement of the theology of mission. To take the latter point first. The strong conviction was expressed from the side of the American theologians present that the missionary task was being presented too exclusively in terms of the second person of the Trinity, and that an adequate statement of the matter must take account of the relation of missions to the rule of God's providence in secular history, and to the work of the Holy Spirit as the primary witness to Christ. The other point is closely related to this, for an exclusively Christological understanding of the Christian mission could well lead to a quite false view of missions as simply the continuation through history of a historical movement initiated by Jesus, something which we have to promote, something for which the events of secular history, the wars and rumours of wars, the rise and fall of empires and civilizations are merely scenery - a view of missions more concerned with the Church than with the world. The attack on the church-centric view of missions, while not iden-

tical in intention with the attack on the purely Christological view of missions, was thus closely related to it.

This double debate obviously raises a great many issues - the nature of the Church, the relation of the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of missions, and the relation of the mission of the Church to secular history. For the purpose of this present lecture I want only to raise two questions: What is the relation of the mission of the Church to secular history? and What is the relation of the unity of the Church to its mission so understood? Let me begin with the first question.

If one turns to the great missionary passages of the Old Testament, it is very plain that Israel is not being called upon to promote some sort of world-movement or programme; she is called to be God's witness - the witness to what He is doing and will do to the nations. He does not require the assistance of Israel in order to cope with the overwhelming power of Assyria and Babylon and Egypt. On the contrary, these great empires are but the small dust of the balance in His hands. He raises them up and brings them down as He will. But the role of Israel is to be the witness and interpreter to the nations of events which would otherwise appear meaningless. Israel has been admitted to the secret of God's counsel, and is therefore commissioned to be His witness. Israel's mission is not concerned with events which are separate from, or over against, the events

of world history; it is concerned with the true meaning and goal of world history - a meaning which is otherwise hidden.

One finds the same thing when one turns to the New Testament. It is most fully set forth in the apocalyptic passages of the Gospels (Mark 13 and parallel passages). The context is Jesus' 'prophecy of the destruction of the Temple. This seems to be the exact contrary of what the disciples of the Messiah should expect and hope for. It is much more than the destruction of one of the most glorious buildings in the world, much more than the destruction of one of the supreme symbols of Man's religion; it is the apparent negation of the prophecy that Mount Zion would be the centre to which all the nations would come to be made the people of the living God. The disciples are deeply disturbed, and ask for light on what is to happen. In reply Jesus gives them an interpretation of the times in which they - and we - have to live, the times between His coming and His coming again. It is a summons to them and to us to understand the events of secular history in the light of His mission.

There are, according to His teaching as recorded in Mark's Gospel, five characteristics of these times:

Firstly, they are times in which men expect and get messiahs. The days are gone when men expected that life would go on as it had always done, when the generations rose and fell like the seasonal blossoming and fading of the flowers, when men counted events by means of a cyclical calendar because all things were expected to return again to their starting point after the pattern of the cycles of natural life. The coming into the world of Him who is Alpha and Omega means that there is a polarisation of human affairs. Things can no longer go round in circles. The question of man's destiny is raised. The idea of salvation, of total welfare for mankind (not just for the individual soul released from involvement in this world) appears on the horizon. Peoples and tribes which had lived for thousands of years in a purely cyclical pattern of existence are drawn irresistibly, irreversibly, into the current of a single world-history conceived in linear terms, in terms of an End to which all history is moving.

Secondly, the sign of these times is that they are times of tumult and suffering for the world. Here there is an exact parallelism between our Lord's words concerning His own suffering and His words concerning the suffering of the world. "The Son of Man must suffer . . . "; "These things must come to pass . . . ". But both these sufferings are filled with hope because they are the birthpangs of the Kingdom. He who has entered into the fellowship of Christ's suffering will enter with hope into the sufferings of the world, knowing that these things must come to pass.

But, thirdly, these days are days of suffering for the Church. And the Church's sufferings have the special character of witness (Marturia) "Take heed to yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils and in synagogues you will be beaten. You will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony to them. And the Gospel must first be preached to all the nations." There is a witness to be borne to the whole earth by preaching and by suffering. This is indeed the purpose of these days. For in truth, in Jesus the end of all things has been revealed. He is the Omega, the end to which the whole alphabet of human history moves. And yet the fulfilment of all things in Him is delayed in order that all men may have the opportunity to recognize Him, and to accept in Him their own true destiny. Yet, as we have seen, it is this coming of the true Messiah which precipitates the appearing of the false ones, the appearing of those who offer total welfare for mankind on other terms than His. It is only by His actual coming at a point

in history that mankind is forced out of the cyclical, prehistoric pattern of existence in which the great majority of the human race has lived, and is brought face to face with the question "to what end?" The witness of the Church to the ends of the earth is thus the point at which the meaning of the time in which we live comes to light.

Fourthly, however, this witness is only in a secondary sense the witness of the Church. Essentially it is the witness of the Holy Spirit: "It is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." This is the steady teaching of the New Testament on the subject of Christian witness. In the days in which Christian missions have worked down the current of secular power, they have been tempted to forget this. The result has been that the missionary operation has looked too much like a human movement of cultural penetration, of education, of training. The fact that Christian missions have now to work against the current is causing many of us to rediscover this New Testament truth, that witness is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, and that the place of the human agency is strictly secondary.

Fifthly, these are days in which the world moves through suffering, and witness to the ultimate issue, to the exposure of the false saviours and the coming in power of the true Saviour - the Son of Man. World history is not the story of a gradual ascent towards a perfect world, but the story of a conflict in which the issues are more sharply defined until the final issue. The crises of history are the foreshadowing of that ultimate crisis. In this passage our Lord is of course looking forward to the particular crisis occasioned by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. But behind this particular crisis; as behind all the crises of history, there looms the ultimate crisis. And this concerns the manifesting of Christ and antichrist, the true salvation on God's terms, and the bogus offer of salvation on other terms - the offer of total welfare, peace, security, happiness on terms other than those which God has attached to these things. The figure of antichrist in the New Testament is a shadowy one, but it has become familiar to us in our day. He produces signs and wonders. He apparently delivers the goods. He has the necessary resources. He knows how to use the media of masscommunication. Those who follow him see results, while those who follow Jesus walk by faith through perplexity, suffering and contempt. Thus the lines through history are drawn more and more sharply. The process of polarisation goes on. And "He who endures to the end, the same shall be saved".

The New Testament thus sets the task of Christian witness to the whole world within the context of an understanding of the meaning of secular history. The Christian mission is concerned with the fulfilling of God's will for the whole world, and it is itself the clue to the manner of that fulfilment. Christians have always been tempted in two different directions - either to identify some particular historical crisis with the ultimate crisis, or to remove secular history altogether from the area which is illuminated by the Gospel - to make an absolute severance between Weltgeschichte and Heilsgeschichte. The former tendency has led to fantastic attempts to calculate the day and hour of the end; the latter has led to an interpretation of missions which concentrates solely on the development of the Church and regards world history as mere background. The fact that the 13th chapter of Mark contains warnings against both errors has led critics to decide that it is a mere compilation of secondary material; the criticism convicts the critics of failure to recognise the real significance of the teaching. The chapter both warns us that "no man knoweth the day nor hour", and also bids us discern the signs of the times. On the one hand we are warned that it is not given to man, not even to the Son of Man, to know the limits of human history; on the other hand we are taught to understand secular history from the point of view of God's purpose revealed in Christ, and to relate the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations to the fulfilment of God's purpose and the coming of the end.

If this is a true interpretation of Scripture, then it is part of the task of a theology of missions to illumine for us the meaning of the events of secular history in which we live. A truly

biblical theology of missions will lead us to be concerned not merely with the success of missions conceived as a human undertaking, but with the whole fulfilment of God's purpose for the world, to which purpose the Christian mission is the clue. It will lead us, for instance, to interpret even such events as the closing of China to foreign missions in terms of the victory of God's kingdom, just as the first disciples had to learn to see even the destruction of the Temple within the same terms.

In the exposition of Mark 13 I have already suggested an interpretation of the time in which we live. The most significant and inclusive generalization which we can make about the time in which we live, is that it is a time in which all nations and people are being drawn for the first time out of static or cyclical patterns of existence into the current - or rather the cataract - of a single world history.

There is now (as the conference of Jerusalem in 1928 rightly saw) a single world civilization, dominated by ideas which have had their origin in the Christian West. No part of the human race is now left outside of the influence of this civilization. Even remote and inaccessible tribes, such as those now being discovered in the Highlands of New Guinea, are being drawn irresistibly, and without their understanding, into its currents. The Indian peasant who has been accustomed to count time on a 60 year cycle, for whom there was no history because it was taken for granted that everything human returns again to its starting point, is now inescapably drawn into patterns of thinking based on successive five-year plans directed towards goals in the future. The old cyclical pattern is irretrievably broken. He has become part of the single irreversible current of world history. There are those who imagine that this current can be held back, or that some people can be isolated from its effects. I think they deceive themselves. Certainly those who have the power to do so have the duty to help primitive peoples to make their adjustment to this new world civilization with the least possible disruption of their lives, and this may include certain temporary measures to lessen its impact upon those unable to master it immediately. But it is quite illusory, I believe, to think that sections of the human race can be for long insulated from its current.

But this single world civilization, though it has its origins in western Christendom, is a culture severed from its religious roots. It is disintegrated culture, devoid of any unifying conception of man's nature and destiny, and therefore it disintegrates 'the cultures which it touches. It breaks up the old unities of culture in the lands of the great non-Christian faiths, but does not offer any alternative unifying principle. I had a vivid experience of this during a visit to the Near East, where I had the privilege of spending some time on the campus of a great secular western university placed in the midst of that Islamic area. The university was strongly secular in its attitudes to religion, and refused to allow any Christian teaching under its auspices. I spent an afternoon with some of its staff discussing the meaning of this. I ventured to ask them what they regarded as the unifying principle which entitled them to the name university rather than polytechnic. I asked, for example, where the faculty of economics obtained the principles upon which it judged what is and what is not a good economic order, and upon what view of man these principles are based. I asked about the principles which would guide the department of history in constructing a course in World History, there in the Middle East. Upon

what principles would one decide which events should be recorded and which omitted? Upon what view of man's destiny were these principles based? At the end of the discussion I had to conclude that the answer - if there was one - was probably "From the Reader's Digest". There was no unifying principle at all. This great institution of teaching was a purely disintegrated force -

breaking up the ancient unity of Islamic culture, but offering no unifying principle in its place, presumably only acting as the preparation for one of the secular messianisms which would move in after it, communist, nationalist, or some other.

For if one goes on to ask: "What is the driving force behind this world civilization? What is it that gives it the power to disintegrate such ancient and massive structures as the religious cultures of India and China and Japan?", the answer is that it is in some form or other the belief in the coming of a new order. This new order may be conceived in various different terms; it may be the victory of the proletariat, or national liberation, or technical progress, or the victory of the great Leader. The important point is that there is a new world just beyond the horizon which is going to be as different from the present world as light is from darkness. It is this faith which gives driving power to the elements of western culture which are being assimilated even by those people who are politically in revolt against western leadership, and which constitute the common world civilization of our time. Plainly this idea of a new order is a secularised form of the biblical faith in the coming of God's kingdom. It is something foreign to the great religious cultures of Asia. It has come to them from western Christendom. It is a striking fact that even while the formerly subject peoples are asserting themselves in the political field against the former colonial powers of the West, they are doing so in the strength of ideas which are rooted in the western tradition. Such movements as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Moslem Brotherhood which have sought to go back to the ancient non-Christian religious cultures for their ideological basis have not been successful in capturing national leadership. This single world civilization, which is disintegrating the ancient cultures of mankind and sweeping their peoples into the stream of a single world history, is powered by a variety of secularised versions of the Christian hope of the coming of the Kingdom.

This picture of what is happening in our time illustrates and is illuminated by the biblical understanding of the shape of history which we considered in studying the apocalyptic passage in St.

Mark. The coming into the midst of history of Him who is the end of history precipitates a polarisation of human affairs. We see this happening in the pages of the Gospels themselves. Men and women who come within the range of His influence are brought gently but inexorably to the point where they have to make a decision about Him. By His coming in the flesh the question of their ultimate destiny is raised in concrete form. They must either confess Him Lord - thereby accepting their true God-given destiny; or else they must deny Him as deceiver and blasphemer - thereby handing themselves over to the power of Satan. The pressing of this to the final issue is seen most vividly in the story of Judas, but it is seen also in the other people who cross the stage in the course of the Gospel story. And from this centre the New Testament sees human history as the working out to the end of this polarising power of the Word made flesh. Once He has come, the question of man's salvation becomes the inescapable question. All history narrows down to the single issue - salvation in Jesus, or the false offer of salvation in some other name, some other system, some other programme. The final issue is: Christ or Antichrist. All nations are inexorably brought to this choice.

The mission of the Church to all the nations is to be understood within the context of this picture of the shape of world history as a whole. It is not the cause of what happens in history, but it is the clue to what happens. It is the place where the meaning of human existence and human history is known, and therefore there is the possibility of participating consciously in its fulfilment. The classic New Testament passage for the understanding of the relation of the mission of the Church to the whole purpose of creation is the Epistle to the Ephesians. Here the Apostle is concerned with the revealed secret of God's will to "sum up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (1: 10). The entire cosmos, which was formed through Christ, is to

be consummated in Him. This is the mystery, hidden before but now made known to the Church. And the Church is not only the place where it is known, but the sign of its reality. The Church is the place where the deepest and most bitter of divisions - ethnic and religious - is being healed, the place where one new humanity is being created in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free. It is the place where those who were strangers to one another, divided by a gulf deeper than even the deepest of divisions that plague our society to-day, were being made fellow-citizens and members of one body. It is therefore the sign, not merely to men, but even to what Paul

calls "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (3: 10), of this ancient purpose of God, hidden and now revealed.

It is important to insist here that the apostle is talking about practical mundane realities. He is talking about the fact that the old rules prohibiting Jews and Gentiles from eating together have been abolished. He is not talking about a merely spiritual unity - whatever that may mean. His extremely vigorous controversy with St. Peter over the matter of eating arrangements shows that he was thinking about the practical realities of human fellowship, with all their sharp concreteness. It is a strange vagary of exegesis that St. Paul's language about the Church in this epistle has been constantly spiritualised, and it has been suggested that he is not really talking about the Church in its visible social existence, but about an invisible spiritual Church of some kind. There is not the slightest vestige of evidence for this in the text. It is a pure importation. Everything both in his writing and in his action shows that he was concerned with the simple social reality that people who had been completely separated from one another were now made members of the same body, so that they not only could but must eat together, worship together, and work together as one family.

This new reality is, of course, something more than a social reality. It is rooted in a new relationship to God. It has been created by what God did for all men in the Cross of Christ. Those who were far off have been - as he says - "brought near in the blood of Christ". They have been "reconciled in one body through the Cross." It is that event, that turning point of human history, that moment when man met his maker in an open encounter and murdered him in the name of the highest ethical and political principles; it is that crisis of all human existence which has precipitated the new situation. That crisis precipitates a crisis for every human being, a crisis that involves the very centre of his being. It involves a total inner re-direction of his existence. But it does not remain a merely inward and spiritual affair. It means being "reconciled in one body". St. Paul will not allow these two to be separated - one body and one Spirit - for he knows that both of them belong necessarily to the one hope of our calling, the hope that all things visible and invisible shall be summed up in Jesus. And indeed we do not need the New Testament to tell us that a so-called spiritual unity which is not expressed in visible community is nothing at all except pious humbug. Such language may deceive those who use it; it does not deceive anybody else.

This Church, then, this one new family created by God in Christ

out of all tribes and nations and peoples, is set by God in the midst of the world as the sign of that to which all creation, and all world history moves. It is the body of Christ, the new man, the second Adam, the new human race, growing up into its full stature and drawing into itself men of every kind. It is here that the world is given the opportunity to see and accept its true destiny; accept or reject it, for both possibilities remain open. The Church is thus in a sense the cutting edge of God's will in history; the place where the decision is presented in ever sharper terms -

Christ or Antichrist. And it is in these terms that we must understand the world missionary task of the Church in our day. In the early days of the modern missionary movement the picture which shaped the thinking of ordinary Christians was different. When Christendom was for practical purposes that small part of the earth's surface occupied by the European races, while the rest of the world lay outside of the light of the Gospel, it was natural to picture the missionary task as the going forth from this citadel into the outer wastes of darkness. To-day we must picture it in terms much closer to those of the New Testament. Christendom to-day - if we can use the term at all - is the fellowship of churches scattered throughout the world, in every country, generally in small minorities, facing not only the ancient paganisms of Asia and Africa, but also the modern paganism of the white man, and the new idolatries of nation, race and class. We have to think of this fellowship of churches in the terms in which St. Paul speaks of the churches of his day, those little companies of people, scattered around the seaport towns of the Mediterranean, holding together an amazing assortment of Jews and Greeks, slaves and their masters, ignorant and learned, in one fellowship; and offering the secret of that fellowship to the whole world. In this world of the 10th century, so rent by divisions that even the nations united are paralysed in the face of problems that one of them alone could easily solve, so filled with fear that it seems to tremble perpetually on the brink of war, the mission of the Church is to be conceived as the presence throughout the world of the one new family, the household of God, the sign to all men of their true destiny in Christ, the servant of all men for Christ's sake, the embassy of Christ to all men everywhere inviting them to be reconciled to God.

But if one asks for such a picture of the missionary task of the Church to-day, one must immediately add that the present life of the Church distorts that picture almost beyond recognition. The Church faces the world not as one fellowship but as a fantastic

medley of splintered fragments divided on grounds of race, of tradition, of doctrine. Instead of seeing the face of its one Saviour, the world sees a monstrous gallery of caricatures. And, to make our sin more sinful, we are fertile in justifications for every one of these divisions. We boast in the names of our great founders - Luther, Calvin, Wesley and the rest - all of them servants of God sent to build on the one foundation. We know what St. Paul said to those who said "I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ". He used the word that must have stung more than any other he could have chosen; he said "You are carnal". Can we doubt that we are under the same condemnation? That when we put the names of men, the human traditions of piety and teaching in which we have been nourished, in the place of the one Cross raised up on earth that all men might be drawn to it, we are in fact carnal - putting our trust in the traditions of men rather than in the Lord who quickens the dead and calls the things that are not as though they were? We find reasons for making "practical" separations among Christians, claiming that this does not touch our "spiritual" unity. But we know what St. Peter said to those who criticised him for eating with the Gentiles: "If God gave the same Spirit to them as to us, who was I that I could withstand God." I think I know something about both these forms of division, for we have wrestled with them in South India during the long years of labour for unity. But I know also that they are a plain denial of the Gospel. By them we publicly proclaim to the world that we do not believe in the sufficiency of Christ to reconcile all men in one body to the Father. The divisions of the Church are a standing and public contradiction before the world of the very heart of the Gospel which we preach. Thank God that the churches_ everywhere are beginning to feel ashamed of them. But feelings are not enough. We still deal with these matters as though we had all eternity before us. We do not. God has work in hand, and He does not allow us to fiddle about for ever while we decide whether or not to do His will. We are blind both to the realities of the Gospel and to the facts of the present world, if we imagine that the question of Christian unity is one that can be left over till to-morrow. And we are indeed fools if, like Augustine before his conversion, we pray:

"God give us unity, but not yet." The question of Christian unity for the sake of the Church's mission to the world is a question not for to-morrow but for to-day.

And in a sense it is a simple question. It has many complex ramifications, but in its essence it is simple. It is the question whether

or not Jesus is the all-determinative centre of the history both of the world and of every man. That is the question upon which all history, and all creation, converges. It is required of the Church that it give an unambiguous answer to that question. That is its mission to the world.

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