



## Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective

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### **1. A Mission to Six Continents**

In the report of the Assembly at New Delhi on world mission and evangelism the rather striking phrase was used: "In this division we face not three continents but six". That phrase is a convenient way of reminding ourselves of the new situation in which the world mission of the church is, a situation which we know quite well with the top of our minds but the implication of which will take us a long time fully to grasp. I must confess that for myself since New Delhi as I have constantly tried to apply this phrase to the day-to-day issues that come across my desk, I have discovered to my own surprise how much of what I have been accustomed to do has to be rethought. The plain fact is that the image which the word missions evokes in the minds of the vast majority of Christian people is still the image of a white man going to Asia, or Africa, or perhaps Latin America. It is still an image shaped by the experience of the colonial era. When we use the word missions we do not normally see, for instance, some of those deeply committed Christians from Jamaica going to work in the pagan slums of Birmingham or Manchester. We do not have in the picture the missionaries of the Asian churches, more than two hundred of them now, going out from their own countries to work in other parts of Asia. And in spite of the fact that the mission history of the Pacific Island churches, more than 120 years old, and of the fact that the Samoan churches are still sending out to New Guinea, for instance, some of their finest young men and women as missionaries, I don't think that one in ten thousand Christian people who uses the word missions ever thinks for a moment of these Samoan missionaries going to New Guinea, or the Solomon Islands. The picture, the image, which controls our thinking about missions is still, in spite of all that we have said, overwhelmingly the image of the white man going from Europe or North America to Asia, or Africa, or Latin America. We are still thinking in terms not of six continents but of three

And when we use the phrase "six continents" we are thinking not only of the mission field to which the mission is directed but we are thinking also about the home base from which the mission starts. In spite of all the theological rediscovery of the truth that mission is the task of the church as such that the church is only properly understood as a missionary body; we do not as a matter of course draw the conclusion that wherever the church exists, however small and weak it may be, that church is the home base for a world mission. If it is true of the church in North

America that to remove the world missionary perspective from it would be to destroy something of the integrity and fullness of the Christian confession, if it is true that to take away from the ordinary church member the obligation to concern himself with taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth would mean a weakening of the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord of all; then it is equally true of the church anywhere in any country, in any land. It is as true of the smallest and youngest and weakest church in Asia or Africa.

In spite of our correct theological statements emanating from the top of our heads, in the working images which so largely control our spontaneous and semi-conscious reactions to situations we have not really accepted the fact that the home base of the world mission is the church wherever it is, and that wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ there is involved in the integrity of their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord an obligation to concern themselves with taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. I confess I was quite shocked when I was in New Delhi for the World Council when in the course of a speech that I made I referred to the obligation of African Christians to concern themselves with the conversion of the heathen of England I was told that some people thought I was speaking humorously. I don't think that in spite of all that we said we have really taken seriously the six continent understanding of the home base Why is this? It is partly because we allow ourselves to be too much governed by worldly factors, by size and wealth and power. If the world mission of the church, if the preaching of Christ to the nations is primarily the responsibility of the rich and powerful, then of course the three continent approach is still the valid one. But we have only to state the matter that way to see how remote our thinking is from the New Testament. The mission of the church as we see it in the pages of the New Testament was not a mission from the haves to the have nots. It was not a part of a movement of technical assistants to underdeveloped areas. When St Paul went from Antioch to Rome he was not in a position to offer any technical assistance to the inhabitants of that city. Indeed it was the other way around. Not many wise not many noble not many mighty were called. It was precisely the have nots who were entrusted with the mission. But our thinking about the missionary work has been so profoundly shaped by the experience of the colonial era that we still find it difficult to escape from the image of missionary work as an enterprise conducted by those who have for the sake of those who have not.

I have never forgotten a little conversation with a group of island people in the South Pacific when we were discussing the missionary responsibilities of the South Pacific churches in that area which is so largely Christianized. They were talking about the very backward tribes recently discovered in the lands of New Guinea and about the few remaining unconverted people of the Solomon Islands. I injected the question whether they had not thought about their missionary responsibility to the wealthy Hindu community in the Fiji Islands and even more to the large numbers of pagan Australians and Americans at present invading the South Pacific as tourists. The suggestion came, obviously, as a shock to them. The word "missions" evoked the image of an operation which reaches down to those who are more backward than ourselves to those to whom we can offer literacy or healing, or medicine or economic upreach. The word "mission" automatically evokes that picture, and the New Testament situation in which the missionary task is precisely directed towards the rich and the powerful is forgotten. If we can recover this Biblical perspective it will help us to get away from the image that we have inherited from the colonial era, and to think steadily, not only from the top of our heads but in our instinctive reactions to the daily tasks that come to us, in terms of not three continents but of six, to think of the mission of the church as the mission of the whole people of God in each place irrespective of whether they be rich, powerful or whether they be weak and without influence, the mission of the whole people of God in each place to the ends of the earth.

And I suggested that this has three implications.

a. First as I have said, it has implications for the interpretation of the missionary task to our people. Here I want to ask a very blunt question. Has the promotional side of missions, if I may use that rather crude phrase, kept pace with our best thinking about the mission of the church? Am I wrong if I suspect that there is often a gulf between the kind of thinking that takes place in a

meeting of this sort, the kind of thinking that takes place at national and ecumenical conferences about missionary questions, and the kind of thinking that lies behind what is preached on a missionary Sunday in the parishes, what is put over in the popular literature of foreign missions? We know, don't we, how much our people love the old image. I have had over and over again the experience on missionary deputation work of trying honestly to convey the picture of the missionary task as I see it and yet knowing all the time that it is not what the congregation wants to hear. I have sometimes felt it was rather like the old children's game "How green you are". I don't know whether you know that game. Somebody is brought into the room blindfold and he has to find a certain thing. The nearer he gets to it the louder we all sing "How green you are". The farther he gets away from it the softer we sing. I have felt the same thing in speaking in missionary meetings. The nearer you get to the old picture of our wonderful missionaries going out to do all kinds of good, to our Christians in our mission station where we have done such wonderful work for the last hundred years, the more you feel the pulse of the meeting quicken; and the farther you get away from it the more you feel a kind of cold lack of concern. I am not ignorant, I think, of the difficulty of the task; yet is it not essential that the image in the minds of ordinary church people should be the true image? I suspect that here is the point where some of our greatest difficulties with the student generation today arise. With the immense mixing up of the student world that is now taking place, many of our students are constantly meeting as fellow students Asian and African people of the greatest ability and competence. And the picture of the world that was given to them in missionary literature just crumbles in the presence of these realities. The same thing happens to those who work in the spheres of international business and politics, and who meet the highly cultured, able and spiritually alert representatives of the Asian and African nations. The incongruity of the traditional image of the heathen as a person who is backward and needing our help becomes intolerably sharp in situations of that kind. I think that it is that contrast between the traditional image missions have created and the reality which they meet, for instance, in their fellow students from Asia and Africa that has helped to discredit the whole concept of missions in the minds of students.

b. Secondly, it has implications for the recruitment and the preparation of missionaries. It means, does it not, that recognizing the fundamental unity of the missionary task in all the six continents we will look for evidence that a candidate for missionary service has already understood what it means to be a missionary in his own country among his own people. We should look above all for evidence that the person has good news and knows how to tell it to his own people, and nation, and culture. There is need for what my friend, Keith Bridston, likes to call the demythologizing of salt water – the exploding of the idea that somehow when one gets over the ocean into another place the whole situation is going to be quite different. The recognition of the fundamental unity of the missionary task, whether it is in America, in Africa, in Asia or wherever it be, will carry the implication that in our recruiting of missionaries we are going to look above all for evidence that the person has shown a capacity to communicate the Gospel intelligibly and relevantly to his own people.

c. And thirdly it will have implications in the field of the relationship between the enterprise that we call foreign missions and the many other agencies of our churches. If we accept this fundamental unity of the whole task – the six continent approach – we will be alert to discover how much we have to learn from each other. Here let me not speak about what others might learn from foreign missions though there is doubtless something to be said under that head. But let us speak about what we in the foreign missionary enterprise could learn from others. Have we not in the world of foreign missions created something of a too self-sufficient empire? Have we been open enough to learn everything that we could from the experience of other agencies of the churches? I am thinking here, for example, of a matter like urban evangelism, the challenge that is presented to us in every continent today by the enormous growth of metropolitan cities. I have the impression that in the foreign missionary enterprise insofar as we try to help the younger churches to cope with this problem we are very much acting as amateurs. Are we keeping the channels open to enable us to learn everything that we could learn easily and quickly from the very large

experience of other agencies of our churches in tackling the problems of the great metropolitan areas, of the inner cities, of the newly developing industrial areas? Are our organizational lines so laid down that that kind of experience is immediately, quickly and without fuss available to the churches in Asia and Africa?

A second area is that of theological education. All of us in the foreign missionary enterprise are deeply involved in helping the younger churches in the training of their ministry. Are we making available to them quickly and easily the very best that our churches have in the field of theological education for the training of their own ministries at home? Does the training of the ministry in America belong in a separate compartment from our concern for the training of the ministry in Africa and Asia? Do we handle it on different principles, with different standards of resources both in personnel and in funds from the standards that we apply in Asia and Africa? Is there an open channel through which everything that is best in our churches in America in the field of theological education naturally and quickly becomes available to the churches overseas?

And thirdly, we might take the field of Christian education and nurture. The point is obvious without my elaborating it. Are we allowing the three-continent approach to prevent the full interchange of spiritual riches and experience in our total world task?

## **II. An Interlocked Secular World**

Now I come on to a second sense in which we have to look at the unity of our task in the world today. We live in an increasingly interlocked secular world. I don't need to elaborate that. It is obvious that the secular world is more and more one single interlocking entity in which political, economic and technological factors are binding all the peoples together in mutual dependence, even if the dependence is sometimes also one of opposition. There is an enormous development of common global planning and thinking in every department of secular life.

At many points this creates a situation in which in our missionary task joint planning of a kind which crosses both confessional and national boundaries becomes absolutely essential if we are to avoid a frivolous and irresponsible attitude to our task. Let me again take briefly a few examples.

a. Take the challenge presented to us by the new initiatives of UNESCO in African education. The more one sees of the developments that are following the Addis Ababa conference of last year, the more impressed one is by the fact that in spite of the vastness of this continent and in spite of the enormous variety both of stages of development and of kinds of program in the different areas of Africa, English, French and Portuguese speaking, a single coordinated plan for educational advance of the whole continent is being developed under the leadership of UNESCO. This presents a massive challenge to the church. Something of the order of 85% of all the children who are in the schools of Africa are in mission schools. That is the level of our involvement in this task. How are we to respond to this new initiative? The idea that all our multitudes of different agencies, of many different nations and of many different confessions, each operating in his own little corner according to his own plans and policies could make any adequate response in this immense new drive for education in Africa is absurd. There cannot possibly be a serious dealing with this great historic moment except we act together across our national and confessional boundaries.

b. The second area is the one I have already touched upon – the area of urbanisation. In these great new cities of Asia and Africa and also Latin America into which people are being drawn from many different tribes and different areas; the old patterns of their life, including their church life, are being drawn into a sort of maelstrom in which all these things are stirred around and mixed together. This creates a situation in which the old lines of denominational separation, and the old divisions of comity become completely irrelevant. The principles of comity which were an excellent expression of basic Christian unity in their day, and which in some places are still the best way of expressing that degree of unity we have, become in this kind of situation completely irrelevant. You cannot have a series of separate confessional approaches to the problems of these great cities. You cannot preserve the old lines of comity in relation to them.

c. A third example is the student world. One of the tremendous facts of our times is the explosion of the student population, not only its absolute expansion in size but also its increasing internationalization. Just the other day I had in my room the student pastor, a very able young Indonesian, of the Asian students in Munich. He told me there are 3000 Asian students alone in Munich University. This is an illustration of the kind of thing that is happening all over the world, the coming into existence of enormous groups of students, international in character. Some of us this summer were in Paris at the Cite Universitaire for the annual meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council. There we saw something of the vast assemblage of students from every part of the world who live and work there in a totally secular atmosphere. As the one expression of Protestant Christian concern for them there was the skeleton of a building which the French church was erecting with some outside help. Support had been sought from the Churches for the past ten years without success. It was one of the most dramatic expressions that I have seen of our lack of a sense of the priorities in the Christian enterprise. One could speak at length of other examples, for instance of the expansion of the student population in India to hundreds of thousands in these past recent years. Clearly this is one of the key points for the future of human affairs. The approach of the church to these universities must be a missionary approach and not a merely pastoral one. By that I mean that we cannot be content simply with an approach which seeks as it were to put a little fence around our own sheep while they are in this period of involvement in the condition of a university world. We need a genuinely missionary approach to the university, which means that we seek a Christian presence within the university, that we accept the cultural and intellectual realities of the university world, the fact that students should be people who ask every question, who investigate every alleged axiom, who raise every basic, radical questions; that we accept the cultural situation of the university and establish within it a Christian presence which will witness to Christ in the terms of the life of the university. I do not believe that that presence cannot be achieved along confessional lines. The issues with which students today are wrestling, the issues which really stand between them and belief of Jesus Christ as Lord are issues to which our traditional confessional divisions have no relationship whatever.

d. And then fourthly there is the challenge of the increasing migration of men and women into other countries, especially the enormous exodus of people from the developed countries in various kinds of service abroad. Roughly speaking for every one person who goes as a missionary from one of the western countries a hundred people go in some other capacity, as technicians, as business people, as servants of the international agencies, and in other ways. Potentially, the future evangelization of the world depends far more on the hundred than on the one. Potentially, this great flood of people, many of whom are not merely nominal but practicing Christians, has an infinitely greater significance for Christian witness throughout the world than has the relatively tiny band of professional, paid missionaries. It is an illustration of the strange clericalization and institutionalization of the missionary movement, that we are still unable effectively to recognize the missionary potentiality of this movement; that in spite of St Paul and William Cary and other later examples of men who have frankly accepted involvement in a secular occupation as the means by which a missionary witness might be given, the call to awaken the churches to the vast significance of this movement of the Christian laymen abroad meets with such a tardy response. The task of preparing those among these immigrants who accept the missionary commitment as a personal commitment for themselves for Christian witness in the circumstances of the developing secular civilization in which they are to play such a decisive part is one of the biggest tasks of the church today. And this too is a task that has to be conceived in missionary terms. We cannot be content with what has been regarded as adequate in the past, namely, a pastoral concern for such people that so far as possible while they are away from the fold they should be protected and kept within reach of the Word and Sacraments. We require a missionary approach to this whole situation. In other words, we require a kind of training which will enable these men and women who are going to be deeply involved in the political and technological and scientific development of the new nations to understand what is the meaning in God's purpose of these developments; what is the meaning in God's purpose of the secularization of these nations, which is the result of

their contact with the Christian west; and how within this process of secularization they can bear witness to Jesus Christ as Lord, not as a kind of extra activity after hours or on Sundays but within the discharge of the task which they are sent by their governments or by their firms to these countries. This missionary approach to their task is the thing for which we are called, and again one has to say that for this our confessional divisions are to a large extent irrelevant, and not only irrelevant but even impossible to maintain. As far as the professional missionary force is concerned it is, of course, obvious that if you send a Lutheran missionary abroad you send him to a place where there is a Lutheran mission. But if a Lutheran is going abroad in the service of IBM or FAO you cannot guarantee that he is going to be sent to a place where there will be Lutherans. He may well be in a place where the nearest Lutheran is 2000 miles away. You cannot apply a confessional pattern to the tackling of a problem of this kind.

e. And finally, there is the challenge of the unevangelized areas, and by this I mean not merely the geographical areas but also human groupings. I think we do not have these areas enough in mind. We spend the greater part of our time concerning ourselves with situations where the Gospel has been preached for many decades and the problem is not that there is no preaching of the Gospel but that somehow or other the Word does not get through. We wrestle, therefore, with the problem of finding forms of communication and witness by word or deed that can make this familiar good news new and credible. But there are other situations in the world where the thing that stands in the way of belief in Jesus Christ is not any unwillingness to hear or any inability to understand but simply the fact that no Christian troubles to go and tell them. One of the most moving things that have happened to my knowledge recently has been this remarkable campaign of the evangelical Church in the Camaroons among the Bamileke people. There you had a church going through the terrible experience of civil war, but in the midst of this experience the leaders of this church said "Let us go and take the Gospel to the whole of the Bamileke people who are involved in this civil war". When they overcame their natural fears of undertaking such a campaign at such a time of danger and strife it was like the armies of Joshua marching round the walls of Jerico. The resistances seemed to fall flat and they found that the whole people from the leaders and chiefs of the tribes downwards were ready to accept the Gospel there and then.

Are we sufficiently concerned about these areas which are simply unevangelized areas, places where the Gospel simply is not being preached by anybody? Do we not create the impression in our total activities today that we are really much more concerned about other things? We are very concerned and able to act swiftly and effectively together in regard to situations of human need, and opportunities for technical development; but in relation to this simple elemental task of taking the Gospel to those who have not heard it we seem to be uninterested.

Now again, this is something which we have got to do together. I don't mean to suggest that some kind of an ecumenical organization can go in and act as if it were a church, baptizing people and building up a membership. But I mean that if we are serious about the evangelization of the world we have to be ready to look together at the big unevangelized groups which still exist in many parts of the world, and plan together how we are going to take the Gospel to them. That is one of the responsibilities which has been laid upon our Division at the meeting in Paris this summer and we hope very much that when we do come up with proposals of this kind there will be many in the churches ready to support. This is something which is really a test of the whole seriousness of our Christian commitment. The question how much do we care if people go without any opportunity to hear the Gospel is really a question how much does Christ mean to us.

### **III Joint Action for Mission**

I want now to speak from another angle about the way in which unity of action is increasing and increasingly necessary. I want to begin with a little personal experience which I have quoted before and if it is old please forgive me, but it has always been vivid in my mind. When I first went as a young missionary to India I found in the area for which I was responsible a village in which there were two Christian families. There had been two Christian families there ever since

the first missionary arrived in 1895 or so. When I probed a little more deeply I discovered that these two families were the joint owners of a piece of land, and that the origin of this was that when the first missionary came and preached the Gospel in 1895 and when the ancestors of these people believed and were baptized, the missionary in order to protect them from the changes and chances of this life and to give them a certain amount of security bought a piece of land and divided it into two parts and gave half to each. It very quickly became clear to me that short of some ultimate catastrophe there never would be more than two Christian in that village, for the simple reason that if there were three it would be necessary to divide the land into three parts instead of two.

That little incident has often stood in my mind as a symbol for something that we all wrestle with in the missionary movement, namely the fact that by our methods in the past we have in place after place created the situation in which being a Christian is understood in the minds of ordinary people not as being called to the membership of a campaign, not being called to be part of an expedition on behalf of Jesus Christ to all men, but being given a proprietary right to certain resources, which are made available from abroad. This can take all kinds of forms, the right to education in a certain kind of school, the right to free medical treatment in a mission hospital, the right to employment or at least to the first claim on employment in various institutions, the right to an occasional visit to Europe or America and the right to expect similar privileges for one's children. And we know how terribly this can corrupt the church. It is a terrible thing to see how quickly a church can be corrupted by this kind of thing, and how it can bring the church into contempt in the minds of the non-Christians around. We know the contemptuous attitude that many non-Christians have to the church, regarding it simply as a body of people who are the beneficiaries of some kind of a foreign organization and who are there because they are beneficiaries. And one cannot help noticing how two churches which come from the same human communities and which face the same situations yet have completely different levels of spiritual depth and strength, and how over and over again one finds that one which has had behind it a foreign board with very large resources has a very low level of spiritual life and that on the other hand one which has had for one reason or another very little foreign resources behind it has learned what it is to trust in God and develop the kind of leadership that depends on that trust. And so one has to sympathize with the kind of exclamations that I have heard Chinese Christians give, exclamations of thankfulness to have got rid of this whole business of foreign money. And I have known in my own life as a missionary that temptation sometimes almost to wish that some kind of catastrophe would occur by which all foreign support would be cut off and the church would really learn what it means to trust in God.

And yet on the other there remains the equally inescapable fact that while there is a vast task to still be completed, while there are immense human needs yet to be met, while there are enormous groups of human beings to whom the Gospel has never yet been preached, and while there are still relatively large resources available ready to be applied to these tasks, it would be not a public abdication of Christian responsibility to say that the problem of bringing these needs and these resources together is too great for the Church of Jesus Christ? This dilemma is one with which I suppose any person responsibly engaged in the whole operation which is represented in this room has to wrestle, whether he stands on the side of the mission board or on the side of the younger church, or whether he is a missionary who, as it were, belongs to both and feels the dilemma most acutely.

As I have wrestled with these problems and discussed them with others it has seemed to me that two things must be said. Firstly, much of the difficulty arises from what one may call the only-child situation of the younger churches. Each of the younger churches has been put in the position of an only-child in its own country without any brothers or sisters of the same parents, and has therefore been tied up in a relationship of giving and receiving unilaterally which can hardly even with the best will in the world become a healthy situation. Each of these churches has been much more closely linked in relationship and knowledge with the sending church with which it is connected than with its neighbour churches of other confessions round about it in the

same country. It has been encouraged to look away from its own country to the church from which its first missionaries came; to look there for help, for contacts, for guidance, rather than to look around it to its own people in the midst of which it lives and to its brethren in Christ with whom it shares the responsibility for Christian witness in that country.

Secondly, within this relationship, in spite of all that we have said about partnership in obedience, it has been impossible to develop a genuine partnership in decision. You cannot get a genuine partnership between two parties, one of whom is always the donor and the other always the recipient. You cannot do that in a personal relationship and you cannot do it in a relationship between two corporate bodies. You can only get a genuine relationship of spiritual equality if you can break open this one track relationship and make it into a multilateral conversation in which there are opportunities, so to speak, for crosstalk. This is the origin of the proposals that have been accepted by the New Delhi Assembly and with which our Division is at present concerned under the name of Joint Action for Mission. The proposal is that we should try to help these only-children to break out of their isolation one from another and to come together in each area with their related foreign boards, not merely for general discussions about what the church ought to do, but actually to put their cards on the table, to be completely frank with one another, to expose to one another fully their relationships, the kind of level of support and help that is being given one way and the other, to examine the tasks around them, the unfinished evangelistic tasks, and the new human situations that challenge Christian response, and together as God's people in that place to face the total task. Here, I believe, is the only possibility of breaking out of this dilemma of which I spoke a few moments ago.

Take, for instance, two bodies that I know very well, the Church of South India and the Lutheran churches in South India. Each of these bodies is linked in a series of private relationships with mission boards in the west, relationships of which the other knows nothing except by hearsay. It is extremely difficult for a mission board in the west to say quite frankly to a Diocese of the Church of South India, "You are asking for too much money, we don't think you are handling this matter responsibly". It is extremely difficult for a Diocese in South India to say the same kind of thing to a mission board in the west. There are many things that we need to say to each other which can only be said in the context of a wider discussion, in a context in which the Lutherans in South India could say a few things to the Church of South India which the mission boards in the west cannot say, and perhaps a context in which some of the mission boards in the west could say a few things to each other which the younger churches cannot say. Our hope is – and one has to recognize that it would only be by the grace of God that it should succeed – that in each area (not an area as big as India but a smaller area such as for instance, an area of the size of Ceylon or Madras State) one could bring together the churches and their related mission agencies to open to one another quite frankly what they are doing, look together at what needs to be done and to seek together corporately to use all the resources that may be available to forward God's mission to their own people.

I think that that kind of joint action for mission may well be equally necessary in many situations in the old churches. I think, for instance, of situations with which we are very familiar in which the inner city is more or less abandoned and the prosperous churches in the suburbs find themselves shut up in captivity from which they find it impossible to escape. I was greatly encouraged a few weeks ago when visiting the Council of Churches in Wilmington, Delaware, to learn the details of a plan they have worked out there by which the churches in each area of the city linked, with a suburban church in each case, would take a missionary responsibility for a whole segment of the city and would act together, the suburban churches and the inner city churches acting in partnership, to tackle the unmet missionary task section by section in each part of that city. I think that this is an illustration of the fundamental unity of our task. What I found the churches in Wilmington doing seemed to me to be precisely an example of the kind of thing that is needed in many of the younger church areas if they are to break out of this sterile introversion in which so many of them are, in which being a Christian appears to be rather



possession of a vested interest in certain resources rather than the participation in God's expedition to the world.

#### **IV. Ecumenical Action and Confessional Loyalty**

I know that when one makes these proposals one immediately raises the very profound and difficult issues of confessional loyalty, and confessional responsibility. Therefore I want to say a word about that. I think it is important that we try to recover the correct meanings of certain words that are constantly being used incorrectly. There are, it seems to me, three words in this connection, all of which are needed. There is the word "undenominational" which I take it to mean a kind of Christianity which is not interested in the particular witness which the individual confessions have sought to bear. A great many bodies which call themselves interdenominational have no right to that name because they are not seriously interested in the particular witness of the separate confessions; they are in truth undenominational. Secondly, there is the word "interdenominational" which I take to refer to a kind of Christian activity in which each of the different confessions is invited to participate, bringing the full truth of that confession as its people understand it without compromise or dilution. And thirdly, there is the word "ecumenical" which properly speaking refers to the task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world. The word "ecumenical" ought not to be used except when there is a worldwide reference. Too many meetings which are in fact simply interdenominational or even undenominational are referred to quite wrongly as ecumenical. And that has given the word ecumenism sometimes a bad flavour. There is a kind of activity which is sometimes referred to as ecumenical in which the real concern for truth out of which our confessional differences have arisen is simply sidestepped, in which there is a concern rather for large numbers or for efficiency in a worldly sense but the real issue concerning the truth as it is in Jesus is ignored. With that kind of pseudo-ecumenism we can obviously have nothing to do.

But the rejection of that must lead on to an attempt to state however briefly the essential basis of a true ecumenism. And for me that basis when I am pressed to define it always lies in the actual experience of the missionary encounter, the encounter with the man, for instance, in the streets of an Indian city who challenges, you the foreigner, to say what right you have to bring the name of a foreign God, of a foreign religion into the land of India. One replies to such a challenge by trying to show him how the name of Jesus is not the name of the leader of one religion, is not the name that we in the west give to God but is the name of the One decisive and final revelation of God the man, the One who alone has brought reconciliation between man and God and thereby created the possibility of reconciliation between man and man. But when one replies that way, the answer always comes back: "But you don't believe what you yourself say; you yourselves are not content with the Name of Jesus. You do not believe that the Name of Jesus is the all sufficient Name because all of you have to add something else to that Name before you are satisfied. We have to conclude that what you are bringing to us is not the one Name of which you speak; it is in fact a whole series of names – the fragments of western European culture which have been projected into our world by the colonial expansion of the 19th century." No missionary can escape the terrible embarrassment that arises when a man has come by the power of the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ, and asks, "Where can I find this family of God of which the New Testament tells me?"; and the missionary, has to answer him this Hindu man in the middle of the street in an Indian village, "You can be a Danish Lutheran, or a Canadian Baptist, or you can be an Australian Anglican, or you can be a British Methodist", and he answers, "But where is the church of God of which this Book speaks for that is what I want to belong to?"

It is out of that kind of encounter that the ecumenical movement, as I understand it, arises. Therefore I believe that the true ecumenism is not something which is evading the question of truth. It is something which is facing at a deeper level the question "What is the truth?" Is the truth ultimately in the Name of Jesus and there alone, or is the truth only to be known by adding something else in the Name of Jesus? The real issue which this missionary encounter raises is the question, "What is the true confession?" What does it mean to confess Jesus today? I would say

that in a situation like the one I have described, the essential confession is, that Jesus is Lord. That is greater than all our confessions. In other words the issue which we face today is basically the same issue that was faced at the Reformation, namely the issue between the traditions of men and the one Word of God, Jesus Christ, mediated to us in Scripture. I believe that that is the real issue the ecumenical movement raises and which is the same issue that has constantly had to be faced through the history of the church.

#### **V. Missionary Advance – the Work of the Holy Spirit**

But movements in the direction of joint action important as they are cannot of themselves bring about missionary advance. Missionary advance is the work of the Holy Spirit and our basic duty is to pray for that work. That sentence can be shrugged off as a merely pious sentence, but it is true. It is the basic task more fundamental than any other to pray for the active work of the Holy Spirit in converting the world. But that prayer will lead us onto certain other things. You cannot read The Acts and the New Testament generally without having the overwhelming impression that the missionary advance is not something which is planned by the church but something which is the work of God.

It is the work of God in a double sense. Firstly, in the sense that God permits events in the outside world which drives the disciples out of their securities, which drive them for instance out of Jerusalem and scatter them among the nations, events which one could describe as merely political or economic events but which the Father uses precisely to scatter his people among the nations. And secondly, it is the work of God in the sense that in this context of scattering the Holy Spirit directs them and turns their experiences into the opportunity for witness. That is the kind of thing which has been happening all through the centuries. It is happening in India today where the movements of peoples and the rapid urbanization of the country are causing the old compact churches built around the group movements, the particular tribes and castes to be scattered throughout the cities and villages of India, so that you find them all over the place far away from their traditional pastoral ministrations. And because we have a wrong conception of the congregation and of the ministry, because we are the victims of a clericalization and institutionalization of the forms of the church we fail to see that this is the work of God. We see it only as an insoluble pastoral problem and we ask how can we possibly manage to secure pastoral oversight for all these odd individual Christian living in towns and villages 50 or 100 miles from the nearest church. I have learned that whenever you see what looks like an insoluble pastoral problem you have only got to turn it upside down and you will find a God given missionary opportunity.

I learned that when I was a very new missionary and scores of young people from our village churches were running away from home against their parents wishes to join the army. I perplexed myself with the question, "How do we provide any kind of pastoral care for these Tamil Christians immature, uneducated, simple people chucked out into western desert, or into Italy or Greece, in a regiment where there are probably hardly any other Tamils and certainly where there won't be any other Tamil Christians?" But before very long God sent the answer to me. I began to get letters first in ones and then in tens and then in scores. "I am the only Tamil Christian in this battalion. There are five other Tamils, I have started a prayer meeting. Please send me five Bibles and five hymn books because we are going to start a Christian congregation."

Now one could multiply such examples over and over again. But the tragic fact is that our concepts of the church and of the congregation are so stereotyped and clericalized that when this kind of thing happens we cannot immediately recognize it and acknowledge it as the work of the Holy Spirit. When we find as we do a solitary Christian policeman who has done precisely that thing in a village where no missionary ever lived, who has gathered in his home in the weekday evenings a group of people to study the Bible and pray together, we cannot because forsooth he doesn't come up to the professional standards required for the ministry, we cannot ordain this man and let him be what the Holy Spirit has made him, the father in God to a new family in the church of God. Let me not go on because this is a big subject. I give that only as an illustration of

the fact that missionary advance is the work of God, it is the work of God the Father, who breaks and scatters His congregations around the world, the work of the Holy Spirit who uses that scattering to create the possibilities of new missionary advance. But woe betide us if our concepts of the ministry and the church have been so ossified by centuries of tradition, that traditional social and academic standards always have right of way over theological, Biblical, principles. Woe betide us if because of that we are unable to seize the opportunity that God gives.

I have gone on much too long but let me close this with a story which perhaps I have told before but which is worth telling because it contains within itself a great deal of what I want to say. Those of you who have done the work of field secretaries know that the point at which the spiritual weakness of the whole missionary movement is apt to come to its most critical expression is at the point of a board secretary's visit to the churches. One has seen churches that are quite capable of standing on their own two feet and behaving like adults, quickly converted to grovelling infants in the presence of a board secretary, whom they put in the place of Providence and suggest that if it were not for the beneficence of the Board, the Church would immediately collapse.

A friend of mine who was a secretary of one of the American boards had been travelling around India for three or four months and was getting extremely tired of this. His last visit was to a little village congregation in the Marathi country. As usual, the elders of the congregation came to him and told him, "You are our father and our mother and we have no help but you. But we have no catechist and unless you provide us with a catechist to look after our congregation, our congregation is going to perish. We always used to have a catechist, and without a catechist we cannot be Christians. Will the Board please provide us with a catechist?" My friend with a sort of inspiration born of despair, perhaps because this was his very last visit, said to them, "Kneel down all of you". Somewhat surprised they all knelt down. He went to the end of the row and he laid his hands on the first one and said, "I appoint you a chatechist". So with second and so on down the row. Then he went to Bombay and took his plane back to America. These were simple village people. They believed in God and they believed that a man of God had come amongst them and laid his hands upon them and appointed them catechists and therefore they were catechists. So they began to do the work of catechists. When my friend came back next time he found there a living congregation.

I do not say that all our problems are solved as easily as that. But I do believe that some of the crucial issues for missionary advance lie at this point. There can be no real advance without community in which the Holy Spirit is present; ready and able to provide the gifts that are needed for the building up of the congregation and for its witness to the world.

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