

attempts by foreigners to dominate or control. A great obstacle to evangelism has been removed by this transfer of all effective control of policy to the Indian Church itself.

The Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement

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BY sheer force of necessity the Ecumenical Movement to-day has forced itself into the forefront of Christian thinking and planning. In face of the quite open challenge now made to their Faith, Christians cannot afford to be weakened by divisions and over-concerned with lesser things. Church co-operation may indeed almost claim prior place to denominational loyalties.

Now this Movement is one which should have a special appeal to Evangelicals; for they of the three schools of thought in the Church of England can justly claim to have done more than any other to further co-operation between the churches, certainly overseas, and in particular so far as the non-episcopal churches are concerned. As therefore the ecumenical movement grows and broadens, it constitutes a real challenge to Evangelicals to continue to play their full part and not allow any craven fear or policy of safety-first to prevent their going into it whole-heartedly and pulling their full weight. For in the unfolding situation they have a God-given opportunity of making a very vital contribution to the whole matter of inter-Church relationships.

But what exactly is meant by the ecumenical movement? Is it the same as the reunion of the Churches? Or is it another term for inter-church co-operation? Or is it some new-fangled idea emanating from America, which calls for a vast expenditure of time and money on lesser matters while the supreme task of winning the world for Christ remains undone? In short, is ecumenicity really necessary? May I try to answer this question by a bit of personal experience, which I hope will lift the whole subject out of the realm of theory into that of practical realities?

I

When we first went to Japan under C.M.S. we were located to Hiroshima, at that time a city of some 160,000 inhabitants—it was double that size when the atomic bomb was dropped. We found ourselves attached to a small Anglican church in the centre of the town, with a missionary as priest in charge and a Japanese catechist. Within a radius of half a mile there was a Methodist church, a Presbyterian church, a Congregational church, a Roman Catholic church, a Seventh Day Adventist church, a church belonging to one of the newer sects from the U.S.A., and a Salvation Army Citadel; and a year or two later the Baptists joined in—nine churches and all, for

convenience, located in the centre of the town. This meant that the suburbs where the bulk of the population lived were unoccupied. With one exception every one of these churches was dependent on missionary society aid for its continuance, the one exception being able to carry on independently only because it happened to have a part-time pastor. Moreover, every one of these churches by stressing its denominational outlook was presenting to the heathen world an incomplete Christianity; and though inter-church relationships were good, yet this whole anomalous position was a direct result of "our unhappy divisions", and, what is more serious, nothing could be done about it.

Such a state of affairs into which we were plunged, dispelled any lingering doubts I may have ever had as to the need of unity. But we were powerless to do anything to remedy the situation; the responsibility lay with the parent churches, and there was no agency to bring them together. One thing at all events we were able to do locally. Because inter-church relations happened to be good (this is not always the case) we were able to co-operate in different ways. In evangelism we ran a hall in the 'Oxford Circus' of the city, where night after night the Gospel was proclaimed to the passing crowds. In children's work we had a flourishing Sunday School Union. I think the biggest Christian demonstration Hiroshima ever saw was when the Sunday schools joined together one year in an act of witness and processed through the town. Again, when later the question arose as to the rebuilding of certain red-light districts, which had been burnt down, the churches were able to take common action in opposing it. These corporate efforts were bits of local ecumenicity, but the bigger bit remained undone; for there was no body to initiate action.

Try to picture for a moment the situation had the Churches represented in Hiroshima been free to plan and work together. I do not think for one thing there would have been fewer churches—nine churches for a population of 160,000 could hardly be called excessive—but they would have been distributed all over the city; and for the very reason that each one would thus be ministering to a specific neighbourhood the better would be its chance of becoming self-supporting. This would mean that the money being given by the home churches would be released for evangelistic advance elsewhere. Moreover when Christians moved from one side of the city to the other instead of having to prove their continuing denominational loyalty by a long tram journey to the church of their own particular brand in the centre, they would naturally link on to the church in the vicinity, and so help strengthen its witness to the community. Moreover the forms of co-operation already in existence would be further enriched by the closer spiritual fellowship of the churches resulting, and so the whole witness to Christ in that great heathen city would become more effective. For the energy spent hitherto in rival efforts would be concentrated on a common and united purpose.

Now it is a situation such as this, only on a world scale, that the ecumenical movement is designed to meet. It cannot ignore the goal of unity, which ultimately is the responsibility of the Churches concerned, but in the meantime it can do much to cut out wasted effort,

bring the churches together in corporate thought and action, and through such fellowship help to bring about a state of affairs which makes the larger aim more possible. True, all this must depend upon the working of the Spirit of God ; but it is my conviction that it is just this working that is bringing us to " such a time as this ".

In that great adventure in unity, the Church of South India, one of the cardinal features of the scheme is that it allows for an interim period of thirty years for the churches to ' grow together '—a happy simile for a living organism, and a plan which, despite its critics, shews real spiritual foresight. The ecumenical movement, now expressed in the World Council of Churches, may be described as this ' growing together ' on a wider scale—" unto a holy temple in the Lord ". It may still be at an early stage and not so rapidly effective as many would like ; but these early stages of growth are natural, and are in themselves a promise of something greater to come.

II

When we ask ourselves how it is that this ecumenical movement came into being, not surprisingly perhaps in view of the example I have given, we find it has sprung from the missionary movement. This fact is important, both in itself, and also to us as Evangelicals : in itself, because it reminds us that while unity and co-operation may be relatively academic questions over here, overseas they are burning issues, for there the sin of our divisions stands out in all its stark nakedness ; and important to us as Evangelicals, because we may humbly claim that in the missionary movement we have perhaps made our greatest contribution to the life of our Church. Even though to-day all schools of thought have a share in this task of world-evangelization, yet the part played by Evangelicals is far and away the most considerable.

The ecumenical movement owes its origin to the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh forty years ago—' Edinburgh 1910 ' as it is generally called. It is striking to think that the two men, who above all others were responsible for that great gathering, are still with us to-day—John Mott and Joe Oldham. Edinburgh 1910 was so unique in conception as to raise a great flutter in the dove-cots of Anglicanism. While the leaders of such Evangelical Societies as the C.M.S. were in it from the start, the S.P.G. would have nothing to do with it (an attitude which happily has considerably modified to-day). Even so moderate a churchman as Archbishop Davidson took the best part of a year before deciding whether to participate. When he did, he made a contribution so effective as to carry considerable weight with that section of our Church which tends to be over-cautious in all dealings with Nonconformists. There were two features of that gathering which call for special mention. (i) Its primary concern was with co-operation, in itself the germinal idea of ecumenicity ; (ii) it was essentially a gathering of missionaries rather than of churches.

There is no need to go over what is familiar ground and describe the growth of the movement which began at Edinburgh that year. From it sprang two other movements, the Faith and Order Movement, concerned with the unity of the Church, whose great inspirer was

Bishop Brent of the Philippines, and the Life and Work Movement, which owes an incalculable debt to Archbishop Soderblom of Stockholm. Nor is there any need to trace the development of missionary co-operation, which found further focal points at Jerusalem in 1928 and Madras ten years later. Suffice to say that there is one great and important change which has come about : instead of being movements primarily concerned with missionary societies and, what are called for convenience, the Older Churches, they have become movements of the World-wide Church. For during these four decades we have watched the emergence of a Christian leadership in the Younger Churches which is one of the most heartening features of the Christian situation to-day.

As a result of the Conferences on Faith and Order at Edinburgh and on Life and Work at Oxford in 1937, it became increasingly clear to those who were leading these two movements that it was no longer possible to keep them in more or less water-tight compartments. Faith and works cannot be permanently separated, even though a Paul may stress the one and a James the other. Accordingly there met in Holland in 1938, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Temple, a group of some seventy-five Christian leaders from all three movements, representative of the World Church, and with the full authority of both Edinburgh and Oxford behind them. There they drew up the first plans for the formation of a World Council of Churches. A permanent committee was set up with Dr. Visser't Hooft, that great Dutch Christian leader, as its secretary, and Dr. William Paton of England and Dr. Charles Leiper of the U.S.A., as his assistants. But "man proposes, God disposes". Within a year the nations of the world were involved in mortal conflict and any thought of a world conference had to be postponed indefinitely. But that the plan was of God is shewn by two striking facts which none in 1939 could have foreseen ; namely, the setting up in faith of a provisional Committee, and the choice of Switzerland as the headquarters of the new movement. This meant that when the flood burst there was already in existence, and in a country not ranged up with either of the belligerents, a small central group who by their world contacts were able to keep alive the flickering flame of Christian fellowship. Not until 1948 did it prove possible to convene the meeting that had been planned ten years previously. In August of that year there gathered at Amsterdam representatives from some 147 different churches from 44 different lands. The invitation had been sent to all churches which "accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour"—a phrase designed to be as comprehensive as possible and yet intrinsically Christian.

Time alone will shew whether August 23, 1948, becomes one of the dates of history, for on that day with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the chair, it was put and carried *nem con* (I think one delegate abstained from voting), by the gathering of 351 delegates from all over the world that "The first Assembly of the World Council of Churches be declared to be, and is hereby constituted". I was present on that occasion and well remember the sense, almost of awe, with which the step was taken, conscious as we all were that we were forging an instrument which, placed wholly in God's hands, might bring untold

blessing to the whole Church of Christ. Spontaneously and immediately the Archbishop led the Assembly in prayer and committed the whole venture into God's hands.

III

But somebody will ask, 'What does the World Council propose to do?' In a nutshell, its purpose is to bring together, and make available to all, those ventures in ecumenicity, of which the actions and hope of the churches in Hiroshima were a picture. In the words of the Report of one of the Amsterdam Commissions: "The World Council of Churches has come into existence because we have already recognized a responsibility to one another's churches in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is but one Lord and one Body; therefore we cannot rest with our present divisions".

How is this responsibility being discharged? There are various departments in the World Council. One is concerned with study, to focus the best consecrated thinking of the Christian Church on some of the great problems of the day on which the Christian voice should be heard. Another is concerned with Evangelism—and how much we have to learn from one another in this the premier task of the Church! Then there is a Youth Department, an essential factor in any movement which seeks to keep abreast with the times. Then too it is concerned with inter-church aid, and with publicity.

As the very word 'ecumenical' implies, the movement is universal in its content. For this reason not only the Reformed Churches but the Roman and Orthodox Churches also were invited to send delegates to Amsterdam. The Reformed Churches were present in force. Such of the Orthodox Church as is outside Russia had an adequate representation, while the Russian Church itself, though unable to send delegates, sent the friendliest greetings. But the Roman Church refused. Yet a truly united Christendom cannot leave it outside. It will have to be a reformed, a very reformed Church, when it does come in. For the time being, however, of its own choice, Rome remains outside; and so far as we can see will continue there, at all events until the rest of Christendom is united. Lambeth has recognized that in this direction the door is banged and bolted, even though there may be some scope for co-operation in the social and international field.

Now in our own Church there is and always will be an element which makes co-operation and unity with Rome its first objective, just as there are others whose prime concern is with the Orthodox Churches, where happily the prospect is more hopeful; but surely common sense, if nothing else, demands that in this great cause we Anglicans should press forward in the direction in which there is the greatest hope of success, especially when those most concerned happen to be our own kith and kin. Up to the dawn of this century the Church of England with its concept of a national church was disposed to recognize the national churches on the continent, whether episcopal or not, but to hold back recognition from Nonconformist churches here, not on any grounds of episcopacy, but as going counter to the *national* idea. It regarded Nonconformity, with some degree of logic, be it admitted, as having been guilty of the sin of schism, a sin which could

only be atoned for by a return to the true fold—how this attitude smacks of Rome! But this position has now been abandoned, and we regard the Free Churches as constituent members with us of the Church of Christ, whatever opinions we may hold as to their sacraments, ministry and polity. Our approach to them then is the same as that to the continental churches.

Now we who are Evangelicals are as a general rule on far better terms with our Free Church brethren than are our Anglo-Catholic colleagues, especially those who are handicapped by a rigid interpretation of the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession. Without in any way sacrificing our principles we are more ready to forward in our respective 'Hiroshimas' the ecumenical cause by co-operation with Nonconformists in Christian service, by united evangelism, and by spiritual fellowship. I would stress this last point, for if we are going to limit our co-operation with them to social and international affairs we shall make no further advance than we do with the Romans.

IV

This leads on to a further point. As Anglicans and Evangelicals, by this generous, and I believe more Christian, attitude, we will be in a better position both to help our Nonconformist brethren towards a truer understanding of what we stand for as Anglicans, and at the same time enable our Church to appreciate what they have to offer. If we have much to learn, we have also much to give. But this gift will not be taken if it be offered in a spirit of patronage.

The longer I live the clearer I am as to the value of our Anglican contribution to the ecumenical movement. In lands overseas, where we do not enjoy the position of being a national church, and where we are brought into touch with other churches, as it were, on the ground floor, provided our church is not of the monochrome type, they get a better opportunity of seeing our Anglican expression than we do of seeing theirs. In Japan, where the Anglicans number barely 10% of the Christian population, what I saw of the working out of our church brought home to me in a way I had never appreciated at home how rich is our heritage and contribution to the Church Universal. But at the same time in a country where public opinion does not accept Christian values, and where the Christian faith is not the faith of the nation, I learnt too to look for and to value all that other churches had to offer. Above all, "whatever our differences", in the great words of Karl Barth, "they are contained within the measure of our unity". These gifts are not going to be recognized or received, if the situation is spoiled by prejudice, the kind of prejudice, for example, made by exclusive and to my mind unsupportable claims on our behalf. The Church of England has been described as a bridge Church, but it is a bridge of more than one pier, and upon those of us who are Evangelicals falls the responsibility of building it in one direction.

There is one more thing I want to say. It may be argued that this all sounds reasonable enough, but can we be sure of the soundness of the faith of those with whom we are asked to co-operate? May not the very desire for a greater ecumenicity lead us into positions in

which our evangelical faith is compromised and our witness to the eternal verities weakened? May we not find ourselves called upon to gloss over differences or indulge in vague generalities for the sake of a so-called greater charity? Despite the sincerity of those who voice such anxieties, I sometimes think that this fear-complex—for from one aspect, such it is—has been our greatest weakness. For if as Evangelicals we believe that by the grace of God we have been granted a truer understanding of our Anglican position, have we not a duty fearlessly to share it with others? It is the other side, surely, that should be on the defensive! I would submit that as Evangelicals we have a responsibility laid upon us to take up the challenge of the ecumenical movement; that it is a movement which is necessary, and one in which we should have a full share, glad of the opportunity it affords of getting our witness across to a wider circle of fellow Christians, and humbly conscious that we have something to learn as well as to give.