

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

ECUMENICAL NUMBER

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Editorial Notes

This is a special Ecumenical Number of The Indian Journal of Theology. The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, an Asian Study Conference, the World Christian Youth Conference and a conference of the World's Student Christian Federation will be meeting in India during December and January. India will be the host to a large number of visitors from Churches abroad. We extend to all of them a hearty welcome. This number of the Journal is dedicated to all those engaged in the work of promoting the interests of Ecumenism. We are printing several articles in this number which deal with various aspects of the life of the Church in India, and we hope that regular subscribers as well as our overseas visitors will find them useful and informative.

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Future church historians will say that this present period is notable for a growing sense of ecumenism in the life of the church everywhere. Ecumenism is the logical result of the world-wide missionary movement of the last two centuries. The founding of churches in the far-flung lands of the globe through the missionary enterprise of the churches of the West had given to older and the younger churches alike a vision of the World Church. Furthermore, it was in the mission field, perhaps, that the initial urge for getting together for mutual understanding was born; at any rate the problems on the mission field demanded consultation between missionary societies. Even as early as the year 1806 William Carey proposed an ecumenical conference. In a letter to Fuller dated May 15th, 1806, Carey wrote thus, 'The Cape of Good Hope is now in the hands of the English. Should it continue so, would it not be possible to have a general association of all denominations of Christians from the four quarters of the World kept there once in every ten years? I earnestly recommend this plan. Let the first meeting be in the year 1810 or 1812 at the furthest. I have no doubt it would be attended with very important effects. We could understand one another better; and more entirely enter into one another's views by two hours conversation, than by two or three years' epistolary correspondence'. As is well known now, it was a hundred years after Carey's suggestion that a conference similar to that suggested by him met in Edinburgh. Carey's faith has been amply justified since Edinburgh. The Editor feels deeply the significance of the fact that he is writing these notes from the very place where Carey had written his letter to Fuller a hundred and forty-six years ago! The Ecumenical Movement therefore has a special significance to the younger churches whose origin is to be traced back to missionary work. We have to take our place in the counsels of the World Church, making our own humble

contribution from our growing heritage to enrich the life of the Church Universal.

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If the Ecumenical Movement is at least partly the result of the modern missionary enterprise of the church, it is perhaps right to say that it will continue to thrive only if the missionary interest of the church everywhere is kept continuously alive. One of the besetting sins of the church anywhere is 'introversion'. The problems connected with the faith and the inner life of the church are always of very great importance, but their very importance may blind the church to its missionary vocation—to that most urgent of all urgencies, viz. *to go out of itself to proclaim the Gospel*. To overcome 'introversion' self-forgetfulness is the therapy. This is achieved in self-giving and the missionary vocation of the church is the most supreme expression of church's self-giving. Ecumenism demands a certain measure of self-forgetfulness. These words have relevance both to the younger churches and the older churches. It is gratifying that the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council are now in association. Consolidation and a forward movement may both be achieved especially in the areas of the younger churches through the co-operation of the two ecumenical bodies.

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One of the other results of the modern missionary movement is the great impulse among many younger churches for church union. It may be freely admitted that the urge for Church Union is partly pragmatic, but only *partly*. One need not be apologetic even for this. A small church in a vast pagan world cannot afford the luxury of denominational exclusiveness. It has to justify its claim before the pagan world that it possesses the power to unite people of different ethos into one single body. Here is something that condemns our divisions and inverts the order of things so that the position of the church as a judge of the world is changed into that of the judged! Two brothers of a Hindu family worship in the same temple and partake of the same 'sacred food' offered to their god. They become in due course Christians, but owing to geographical situations they become members of two different denominations that are not in communion with each other. As Hindus they went to the same temple to worship and partook of the same 'sacred food'. Now as Christians they worship in two different churches and cannot join at the Sacred Feast of the Lord! For the Hindu no amount of theological wisdom can explain this scandal. Christian disunity and denominationalism are commented upon by our Hindu history teachers in schools and colleges.

This is only part of the reason for the urge behind the church union movements in some of the younger churches. The main reason is that the Gospel, the preaching of which brought them into existence and which they in turn have to preach continuously if they are to exist in the pagan world, is the Gospel that proclaims 'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism'.

Along with the growth of ecumenical consciousness in recent years, there has also been a steady growth in the urge for confessional movements. In one sense perhaps this is a logical development. Ecumenism presupposes church loyalty and church loyalty is first cultivated through the participation in the life of that branch of the church to which one belongs. But what is a psychological fact and a fact even spiritually helpful need not be elevated to one of a perpetual spiritual necessity. Confessional movements have not been always friendly to church union movements. Perhaps at this stage confessional movements are necessary to strengthen the World Council of Churches. Eventual Christian unity must perhaps be preceded by a deepening sense of appreciation of one's own confessional heritage. As long as the search for unity is there, the purely contingent need not frighten us.

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There are some who are obviously frightened that the World Council of Churches may tend to bring into existence a Super-World Church, parallel to the Church of Rome. And the plea of some of the representatives of the younger churches that the World Council of Churches should give more heed to the movements of the church union is sometimes misunderstood as a plea for the creation of such a Super-World Church. We understand that 'One Church' does not necessarily mean one Super-World Church. According to our understanding, the New Testament Church though one, found its unit to be in the local Church. The reality of the Church Universal was to be found in the reality of the local Church—a worshipping and witnessing community in its own locality. Oneness and plurality are reconcilable and organic union need not necessarily end in a highly centralized organization. Geographical and cultural differences there will be and administrative autonomy will accordingly be necessary.

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Those of the West who are interested in the church and missionary work in India, ask often what the prospects of Communism are in India. Someone said that foreigners are pop-eyed and natives are shut-eyed in regard to the phenomenon of Communism in India! We think there is great deal of wisdom in this statement. It is reported that some missionaries on deputation among their home churches are tending to give a far graver view and estimate of the present situation in India than facts justify. On the other hand, it also seems a fact that some of our indigenous leadership is not alive to the implications of some of the recent events in India and on the whole seems unaware of the fortunes of the church in lands where Communism won absolute political power. While there is no need for our friends in the West to think that all is lost in India, our Christian leaders at home must show greater concern for the future of the country and the Church.

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'The Church in India must repent of its social compromises with caste, lingualism and communalism'. 'We are nice, decent people who practise caste, demand dowries, exhibit social and colour prejudices. . . .

and sing "He hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted the humble and meek" without turning a hair'. These sentences are lifted from an article that appears elsewhere in this magazine. One may not agree with all that is said in this article but it is a reminder to the church in India and elsewhere that there is a great deal of worldliness in it. With such worldliness within it, the church cannot fight with vigour and conviction evil outside it. Few Christians will deny that Communism constitutes a real danger for human welfare and for those values for which the Christian faith stands. At the same time, neither the church that makes compromises with the world and its ways nor the church that turns away in contempt from the world in which it is set and resorts exclusively to an other-worldly pietism, can effectively fight against Communism. The present situation in India and in the world calls for repentance on the part of the church here and elsewhere, for its divisions, its worldly ways and its ineffective witness to the Christian gospel of redemption. There is also a call to us particularly in India for a positive and concrete approach in accordance with the mind of the Master, to contemporary problems that are a source of confusion and even despair to men everywhere.

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It is a matter of great satisfaction that the World Council of Churches is alive to the great need to train Christian churches everywhere to take an intelligent and active Christian interest in contemporary problems of the human society. We commend to our readers the study programme of the World Council of Churches, sponsored through its study Department. Through the activities of this Department there is a continuous flow of ecumenical conversation the world over, on such subjects as 'The Christian Hope', 'The Responsible Society', 'Meaning of Work', 'Race Relations' etc.

Lest one should think that the activities of the World Council of Churches in this regard are confined only to the promotion of theoretical discussion, we draw the attention of our readers to the activities of the Churches' Commission on International Affairs—a body jointly set up by the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. The report of this Commission concerning its activities during the year 1951 makes very inspiring reading. Among other activities, its 'lobbying' (using the word in its best sense) in appropriate places has played a no mean part in such matters as the formulation of 'the Charter of Human Rights' by the U.N.O.'s Commission on the subject and in the spreading concept among the industrially advanced countries, of aid to underdeveloped countries.

On the whole the two ecumenical bodies, viz. the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, which now work in close co-operation, deserve our fullest support and co-operation. There can be no doubt that they are potent instruments in the hands of God for the furtherance of His purposes in the world.