

THE WORLD MISSION OF THE CHURCH

TAMBARAM, 1938

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**THE WORLD MISSION
OF THE CHURCH**

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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE MEETING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL
MISSIONARY COUNCIL

TAMBARAM, MADRAS, INDIA, DEC. 12-29, 1938

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL
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INTRODUCTION

THE World Meeting of the International Missionary Council, held at Tambaram, near Madras, from the 12th until the 29th December, 1938, brought together 471 persons from 69 different countries or territories. It had been the subject of organised planning on the part of the Committee of the Council, and of the National Christian Councils and missionary conferences related to it, for over three years. The record of the findings of the meeting, contained in this volume, will be best understood in relation to the nature and constitution of the International Missionary Council and the place it occupies in the Christian ecumenical movement, which is an outstanding feature of organised Christian life in the present day.

The International Missionary Council

The International Missionary Council was the child of the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910—an historic gathering from which a great deal of the modern growth of interdenominational and international co-operation takes its rise. At that conference there was formed a Continuation Committee, which maintained much of its work through the years of the world war. In 1920 the International Missionary Council, in substantially its present form, came into being, based upon a number of constituent memberbodies, either associations of missionary boards and societies in the western countries or National Christian Councils in the countries of the East, Africa and Latin America.

In 1928 there was held at Jerusalem a World Meeting of the Council, distinguished from the Edinburgh gathering of 1910 by this, among other features, that it comprised a considerably larger representation of what had come to be called ‘ the younger churches ’ than had been brought together at any previous gathering. The number of new Councils has increased until there are now 26 national organisations contained within the International Missionary Council, and of these 14 are groups of missions in the ‘ sending ’ countries and

12 are councils of churches (sometimes of missions also) in the 'receiving' countries.

The Decision to hold another World Meeting

It was, therefore, not in any way surprising that when the time came for another world meeting to be held it should be still more largely representative of the 'younger churches.' Both the conditions in which the world-wide work of the whole Church was being carried on, and the history and principles of the International Missionary Council, made it appear right and natural that there should now be held a meeting in an eastern land, to which could come with the least expenditure of time and money adequate delegations from the 'younger churches.' Only in such a meeting, roughly equal in the representation of East and West, of 'older' and 'younger'—such designations are all inaccurate and incomplete but must nevertheless be used—could there be a world consultation upon the task of the Church such as the times urgently demanded.

Perhaps no thought was more continually in the minds of those who met together at Tambaram than that their assembling was in itself a miracle of God's goodness. It may be questioned whether any gathering has ever been called together, under either ecclesiastical or secular auspices, which represented so many nations and territories, and that this should happen in the year 1938 in a time of almost unprecedented international tension, gave to every member a sense of profound responsibility.

The choice of site had been attended by much difficulty. Originally the decision, taken by the Committee of the Council at Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1935, was for Kowloon, in the leased territory opposite Hong Kong; a decision taken when strong invitations had been sent by Japan, China and India. Later consultations led the Committee to decide upon Hangchow in China. Still later, when the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese conflict made it wholly impossible to contemplate the holding of an international meeting in China, a meeting of members of the Ad Interim Committee of the Council, held in New York in 1937, gave most anxious thought to the question whether any meeting should be held, and if it were to be held, where? There were obviously plausible arguments for abandoning the entire plan, but still stronger arguments for proceeding with it. The increasing obstacles in the path of all inter-

national action were held to be so many additional reasons for gathering together Christians of all nations to take counsel on the urgent and baffling problems and to seek the Divine wisdom to guide their work ; the preparatory work already done ought not, it was felt, to be lost. In the end it was decided to accept the invitation of the National Christian Council of India and to hold the meeting in the splendid new buildings of the Madras Christian College at Tambaram, some sixteen miles outside Madras. It may be said without exaggeration that no more suitable premises could have been found anywhere in the world, and no small part of the success of the meeting must be ascribed to the peace, convenience and beauty of its setting.

The Central Theme

From the beginning it was determined that the central theme of the meeting should be the upbuilding of the younger churches as a part of the historic universal Christian community. At the meeting of the Ad Interim Committee at Salisbury in 1934 it was strongly urged that the meeting should concentrate, both on grounds of principle and on those of expediency, upon the 'on-going Christian community.' In some quarters the wisdom of this was doubted—in regions where there was as yet only a tiny Church and virtually all Christian work was still in the narrower sense 'missionary' work ; in other quarters where it was felt that 'Church' meant an absorption in the problems of the ecclesiastical institution. But it came to be generally agreed that nothing was so vital to the whole Christian movement as the consideration of the Church itself, the faith by which it lives, the nature of its witness, the conditions of its life and extension, the relation it must hold to its environment, and the increase of co-operation and unity within it.

It must here be noticed that in this choice of central theme the International Missionary Council came into the same stream of thought as two other branches of the ecumenical Christian movement, namely, the World Conference on Faith and Order and the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work. Each of these bodies held in the year 1937 a great world meeting, the one at Edinburgh in succession to that of Lausanne in 1927, the other at Oxford, on the theme 'Church, Community and State,' in succession to that held at Stockholm in 1925. At each the central theme was the Church,

having in view chiefly, but not exclusively, the older churches. In the one case the discussions dealt with matters definitely ecclesiastical—creed, ministry, sacrament—but always with the mission of the universal Church in mind. In the other, the major concern was the distinctive life and mission and message of the Church in relation to the characteristic challenges of modern life with its new pseudo-religious allegiances. In each of these great gatherings, less varied in race and nation than that of Tambaram but more varied in denomination and church tradition, there was to be discerned the sense that for the Christian cause all depends, under God, upon the life of the Christian community, the quality of its witness, the cogency with which within the varied and tumultuous life of man that community believes in and lives upon the power and wisdom of the Gospel.

It was no different with the Tambaram meeting. Though for some an emphasis upon the Church was at first taken to mean an emphasis upon ecclesiasticism, and voices were raised in reminder that the Church existed for the Kingdom, there was no disposition to accept the view that the Christian religion is to be thought of as general ideas, still less that the Christian enterprise throughout the world can be conceived as an effort maintained by the older Christian West. It was common ground to all that the faith, the witness and the life of the living Church all over the world lie at the very heart of the whole Christian mission.

Programme

The subject of the meeting was dealt with under five main divisions. There were in the first main division, the Faith by which the Church lives, two sections, each in a sense theological inasmuch as they were set to discuss fundamental principle: one dealing with the Faith by which the Church lives, and the other with the nature and function of the Church.

In the second main division, that of Witness, there were four sections. One dealt with the unfinished evangelistic task; another with the relation of the Christian witness to the non-Christian religions and cultures; another with the distinctive place of the Church in the work of evangelism; another with the numerous practical questions which arise in the conducting of the work of evangelism.

In the third main division, that of the life and work of the Church, there were five sections. The first dealt with worship, the Christian home and the Christian training both of young and old ; the second with the all-important matter of the training of the Christian ministry both ordained and lay ; the third with the place of the institution—educational, medical or social—in the total life of the Church ; the fourth with the place, function and training of the missionary ; the fifth with the vital and neglected subject of Christian Literature.

In the fourth main division, that concerned with the environment of the Church, there were four sections. The first dealt with the economic basis of the Church—a theme of high importance both to the younger churches seeking to become rooted in the national soil and to the older churches on whose help they still in some measure depend ; the second with the relation of the Church to the social and economic order, changing everywhere in the world and not less in the East and in Africa than in Europe and America ; the third with the relation of the Church to the international order ; the fourth with the problem of Church and State—a topic debated through all the ages of the Church and yet with a special and urgent meaning for many of the ‘ younger ’ churches.

The fifth main division was covered by a single section, the subject of co-operation and unity. Here fell to be discussed the question whether a closer and more combined use of our total resources in personal and financial power is possible ; whether the whole movement of co-operation is based on sound foundations ; and whether as a part of this more intimate and combined working a larger measure of Church unity is not necessary. (On the last point it is to be noted that the International Missionary Council, not being composed solely of delegates appointed by churches to consider union, could not put forward or discuss terms of ecclesiastical unity, but could, and did, discuss the relation between such movements towards unity and the wider movement for Christian co-operation.)

Preliminary Studies

In preparation for the meeting a considerable amount of material was produced and made available to all delegates. A pamphlet of questions, based upon letters of advice from all parts of the world, was sent to each delegate long in advance, in order that individual and group thought and study might be directed to them. The

Committee of the Council asked Dr Hendrik Kraemer to write a book upon the evangelistic approach to the non-Christian religions, and the result was *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, a book of which it may safely be said that it has caused more profound thinking on the very bases of the missionary enterprise than any book written for many years. Mr J. Merle Davis, director of the Council's Department of Social and Industrial Research and Counsel, was successful in producing, in conjunction with many individuals, groups and institutions in India, China, Japan, the Philippines and the Netherlands Indies, a series of studies on the economic basis of the Church, problems of mission and church finance, and kindred topics, constituting a body of factual material such as had never before been provided. Two volumes on evangelistic work were edited by Dr Mott and Mr Paton, gathering together different traditions and convictions about evangelism and surveying the experience of recent years in many countries. A special double number of the *International Review of Missions* was published in July 1938, bearing especially upon the problems to be faced at Tambaram. Pamphlets, papers and books by Mr D. T. Niles, Prof. T. C. Chao and others were circulated. In addition to all this there were a large number of papers, articles and studies produced in the different countries for the instruction of their own delegates and the extension of interest among their church members. Of these some were made available for group discussions at Tambaram. Finally, mention must be made of an elaborate Statistical Survey of Christian Missions, covering the whole world and dealing for the first time with indigenous churches as well as with missions, and prepared with special reference to the meeting.

The Conduct of the Meeting

More than most of such gatherings, the Tambaram meeting did its work mainly in groups varying in size from fifty to seventy, and spent relatively less time in plenary session. After the meeting had been constituted on the opening evening (the chairman and secretaries of all the groups had met for a week-end of prayer and conference beforehand), the whole of the next day, 13th December, was given to guided meditation and prayer. For the next four days two morning sessions and one in the afternoon were devoted to the groups whose reports appear as I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, IX and XII

in this volume. In the second week the remaining groups similarly devoted three daily sessions to their work. Drafting committees did their work in the interstices left in the daily programme, and on the Friday and Saturday of the second week the two sets of groups surveyed the work of their draftsmen and put it into form for the plenary sessions. These final sessions of the whole meeting, in what had inevitably to be an atmosphere of some tension and pressure, discussed the work of the groups, accepted and commended the reports, as amended, to the favourable consideration of missionary and church bodies all over the world.

In the evenings there were either addresses delivered to the whole meeting by chosen speakers dealing with great central themes, or meetings of special groups concerned either with regional problems (Latin America, the Muslim world, the Pacific Basin countries, Africa, etc.), or with special themes such as Church Union, the particular needs of urban and of rural areas, or the relations between the older and the younger churches.

On the two Sundays, of which the second was Christmas Day, there was a truce to all discussion. Each began with a celebration of the Holy Communion, on one Sunday after the manner of the Reformed and Free Churches and on the other after the Anglican rite, and to each all were invited. There followed a morning meeting in which, on the earlier Sunday, two most memorable addresses were delivered, on the Inner Life of the Church and on Winning the World for Christ. On Christmas Day this meeting took the form of a series of testimonies by chosen delegates from many countries, each telling of what the glorious tidings of the good news had meant to his or her own people.

Each day began with a meeting for united worship, in which with much variety of method, reflecting the diverse traditions of the churches, the day's work was begun in meditation, prayer, praise and the hearing of the Word. Many informal gatherings for prayer were held, and an all-night vigil, arranged by some Anglican delegates, was joined by many of other churches.

The Results of the Meeting

The delegates finished their work and sent their reports, findings and recommendations to the world believing that they had by God's grace been enabled to partake in a common experience of which no

resolutions or reports could be more than an inadequate expression. Yet it is believed that these findings will be found worthy of careful study. A full use of index and of cross-references will easily enable any reader to discover all that the meeting had to say on a given subject. Though less rich in ecclesiastical scholarship than the Oxford and Edinburgh meetings, the Tambaram meeting contained within its membership more knowledge of the actual work of the Christian Church throughout the world than has ever been assembled, and the findings should be read as the work of men and women who believe, with great and detailed knowledge, that these things which they say ought to be said, and that these plans which they put forward are needed, timely and feasible. The separate sectional reports vary in style and method of address, reflecting in this the wide diversity in the men and women to whose leadership their form is due. But it will be found that there are few questions to which thoughtful people have given utterance as they have pondered over the missionary enterprise of the whole Church during recent years, to which some answer is not given here.

Yet the value of such findings and resolutions is perhaps to be found chiefly in the closeness of spiritual and intellectual contact which the effort to agree upon them engenders. Unless there is the effort to find agreement in saying something together there is not likely to be in evidence that strong determination to understand the other and to be understood by him, and in the tension between two points of view perhaps to find a higher truth, which leaves on all those who have experienced it an ineffaceable mark. To meet together and enjoy good fellowship is a good thing and not to be despised, but it would not justify the immense effort of holding a world meeting such as that of Tambaram. What matters is the intense contact of those who, believing that they have something to give each other, believe also and still more strongly that they are all alike to be taught of God and to hear His Will. It is to this process that the effort to agree in verbal statement is so important, and while the delegates believe that their resolutions do in fact contain much that is of real importance, they themselves have received more than any resolutions can express.

Some of those benefits may be hinted at in a few phrases, more suggestive than descriptive. When a young delegate from one of the island churches said 'this is better than going to a university' he

did not mean that Tambaram had an academic value; he meant that his seventeen days there had meant the opening up of a new world. Men and women from churches still backward in education and leadership found in meeting those from the older and maturer churches, both of the East and of the West, a new meaning in Christian leadership and a vision of a world-wide fellowship. Of this there were multitudinous examples, and this fact alone is an abundant justification for all the time, money and effort expended.

Again, such a meeting makes possible certain smaller meetings within itself which would be impossible without great effort and cost. East, West, South and Central Africa have never met together before as they did at Tambaram. It is something of a paradox that they should come to India to do it, and yet by doing so they were helped to become conscious not only of Africa but of Africa's place in the Christian world community. Latin America could meet together—incidentally the meeting forced the fact of Latin America on many minds hitherto unaware of its existence except as a geographical expression. The labourers for Christ in the vast Muslim world could meet together—people from Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iran and Arabia with those from the greatest of all Muslim lands, India, and from the Netherlands Indies where alone in the world there is a large church drawn from Islam. The countries bordering the Pacific—not only China and Japan, the Philippines, Siam and Malaya, but Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada could face together problems which are theirs in common. The tale of such minor (though immensely important) meetings would rival in total importance the central, combined work of the meeting itself.

The concrete reality of the life of the younger churches was vividly suggested by the two exhibits, one of Christian literature and the other of Christian art and architecture, which were open to delegates throughout the conference. Beyond their immediate and most important purpose, these exhibits made it possible to visualise much of the detailed services undertaken by the churches, and their living relation to the different national heritages within which they were set.

Many will look to the deliverances of the meeting for light and it may be for judgments on the great concrete problems of the modern world, especially that of war and the growth of nationalism and nationalistic or imperialistic aggression. A resolution was passed

which will show why such judgments were thought to be both unwise and wrong. But no one who was at Tambaram will be tempted to minimise what was in fact accomplished in this realm. The times in which we met lent a great gravity to the deliberations. Germans and French, Indians and British, Chinese and Japanese, Northern and Southern Americans, were all able to enter into a supra-national fellowship which was not of their own making, and to see their national problems in the light of that fellowship. What they learned from one another only time can unfold, but it is not possible to pass through such an experience without deep change.

But all these elements that went to make up the whole are but ways of saying the same thing, that there is a drawing together of the whole Christian Church in the providence of God, and that it has pleased Him to use such instruments as the International Missionary Council and the Tambaram meeting to further this process. To say this is not to minimise the differences and divisions that remain, nor to exaggerate the unity that exists. But it is hard for anyone who has entered even a little into this characteristic modern feature of the life of the whole Church not to feel that here God is manifestly at work, in spite of our weakness and pride, and that the deepest significance of this meeting lies in the place it will hold in that sequence of redeeming action whereby He is leading back His people to be one, even as He and the Son are One.

JOHN R. MOTT
WILLIAM PATON
A. L. WARNSHUIS

S.S. *Strathnaver*,
At Sea, 26th January 1939

REPORTS OF THE SECTIONS

The reports of the sections, after discussion in plenary sessions, were adopted by the Council for transmission to the National Christian Councils, missionary conferences, and churches and missions for their favourable consideration.

I

THE FAITH BY WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES

The Need of the World

The Christian Church to-day is called to live, and to give life, in a world shaken to its foundations.

When the International Missionary Council met at Jerusalem ten years ago, the faith was strong that a new and better world had been born amidst the destruction of the Great War, and that the Church might lead in building it up. To-day that faith is shattered. Everywhere there is war or rumour of war. The beast in man has broken forth in unbelievable brutality and tyranny. Conflict and chaos are on every hand, and there is little hope that statesmanship can do more than check temporarily their alarming spread.

The outward confusion of man's life reflects, and is reflected in, the confusion of men's hearts and minds.

Many have lost all faith. Not only their faith in the gods of their fathers; but faith in all they had believed most certain and important—in reason and in truth, in honour and in decency, in the possibility of peace and the power of right. They are overwhelmed by a sense of utter impotence and despair.

In others there is a resurgence of faith, often faith in new gods. For whole peoples, faith in their nation or class serves as religion and wins absolute devotion. These faiths come as rebukes and challenges to an easy and hesitant Christianity. But, rooted in false or inadequate ideas of man and the world, they tend to aggravate the world's disorder; their issue is war, persecution and cruelty of men to one another.

Others, though bitterly disillusioned, still seek to rest their confidence in science and man's power to redeem himself, yet secretly they feel that confidence is vain. They long for a faith that can bring a surer hope to their own lives and to their civilisation.

Meantime want, ignorance, superstition, fear still hold their sway over the lives of countless millions. The cry of the multitudes for deliverance still goes up. They know not where to turn, or whom to trust.

Mankind's great need is for a true and living faith.

The Heart of the Gospel

It is in and to this world that the Church must conduct its mission, seeking to repossess and proclaim its God-given message in all its truth and power.

But first we must come in penitence to the feet of God. In the presence of these disasters and forebodings, we see the judgment of God's righteousness upon our society ; but we see also His judgment upon our churches—so enmeshed in the world that they dare not speak God's full word of truth unafraid, so divided that they cannot speak that word with full power, so sullied by pettiness and worldliness that the face of Christ cannot be clearly discerned in them, or His power go forth through them for redemption. We must come too in deep humility, knowing that no merely human deed or word of ours will suffice to meet humanity's need. God's words and deeds alone are the healing of its sickness. Yet it is still His will to utter and accomplish them through His Church. His promise is still that His strength shall be made manifest in our weakness.

What then is the Church's faith, not in its whole range and depth, but in its special meaning for our time ?

WE LIVE BY FAITH IN GOD, THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

ABOVE ALL AND IN ALL AND THROUGH ALL IS THE HOLY WILL, THE CREATIVE PURPOSE, OF THE MOST HIGH. THE WORLD IS HIS AND HE MADE IT. THE CONFUSIONS OF HISTORY ARE IN THE GRASP OF HIS MANIFOLD WISDOM. HE OVERRULES AND WORKS THROUGH THE PURPOSES OF MEN, BRINGING TO NOUGHT THEIR STUBBORN AND REBELLIOUS LUST FOR POWER BUT BUILDING THEIR FIDELITY INTO THE STRUCTURE OF HIS REIGN UPON EARTH.

MAN IS THE CHILD OF GOD, MADE IN HIS IMAGE. GOD HAS DESIGNED HIM FOR LIFE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HIMSELF, AND WITH HIS BROTHERS IN