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THE CHRISTIAN MISSION AT THIS HOUR

JOHN A. MACKAY

I HAVE been asked to introduce to your attention the chief subject of concern that has brought us to Ghana, and which will constitute the main theme of our deliberations during the days we spend together. *The Christian Mission at This Hour*—this is the topic of my address and the theme of the Assembly.

Let me begin by asking, What do we understand by “this hour”? How do we interpret the “Christian mission” in such a time? It is a permanent Christian obligation, and one enjoyed by Jesus Christ himself, that Christians should “discern” the particular time in which their lot is cast. Such “discernment” can be exercised in two ways: first, in terms of *historical perspective*, and second, in terms of *apocalyptic significance*.

As regards the *historical perspective* in which the Ghana Assembly is set, this is the first occasion on which a meeting of the International Missionary Council takes place in Africa. This in itself is important. We assemble, moreover, in the territory of one of the two youngest nations in the world. The only nation still younger is Malaya. Ghana is a country which symbolizes in a glorious way the steadily growing importance of the Negro race; it is the harbinger of an era which lies beyond the tragic tensions of the present hour.

There are familiar faces, however, that we miss. No delegates from China are here, although last week in Hungary I met Chinese fellow Christians

who were visiting the Protestant Churches of that country. This is part of our tragic situation. In certain regions of the globe, alas, Christians cannot confer today with fellow Christians who are the fruit of their missionary labors because the nations to which they respectively belong are bitterly estranged from one another.

Certain other facts, also, are worthy of attention as we approach our theme. A world so closely united by technology that space and time have been transcended is, at this hour, so divided by suspicion and hate that universal discord is regnant. Those of us who come from the West are poignantly aware that the prestige of the Western world has been rapidly declining and that the white man's sovereignty is being boldly challenged. Yet at the very time when no missionaries can enter certain countries in Asia, we have the joy of knowing that in those same lands vigorous new churches, which are both national and autonomous bear witness to Christ and the Gospel.

When we take a closer look at the life of mankind today we realize that this is an *apocalyptic hour*. It is an hour weighted with destiny, an hour when the elemental forces of human nature and history are laid bare, and when a titanic struggle is in process to determine the type of human individual who shall populate the world of tomorrow. Let us ask this question: Where exactly do the hands now stand on the

clock of time, and what is the inner spiritual meaning of "this hour" in the history of the Christian Church and the destiny of the human race?

We are living in what the Bible calls "a day of the Lord," a day of darkness rather than of light. Yet our time is one of God's springtimes, albeit, one of his terrible springtimes. It is like that springtime which the prophet Jeremiah saw in his youth on the Judaeen plateau near his home in Anathoth (Jer. 1: 11, 13). Gazing at a spray of wild almond, the first shrub in the land of Judah to show signs of life at winter's close, the young prophet became vividly aware of God's quiet awakesness. But he saw something else also. In the background, he saw a boiling cauldron set on glowing embers that were fanned by a northern breeze. The sizzling pot was a symbol of an approaching attack from Israel's enemies in the North country. But this is the important thing: The green spray, the symbol of divine mercy, and the fuming vessel, the symbol of divine judgment, were equally a part of God's springtime awakesness.

We cannot escape the fact that while we meet in this lovely place "darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people." This is another phase of our tragic situation. The road which millions and millions of our fellow men and women travel today finds them literally on "a journey through Dread," unlit by any illumination from above. They are pilgrims in a world without values, in which self-interest, expediency and compromise are the sole absolutes. In international relations, the current trend is to reduce every problem to a scientific problem, to a problem of technological achievement, or of military might. More urgency is shown in

getting a mechanical gadget into the sky than in sitting down to talk quietly with estranged fellow humans on earth. Men are more interested in soaring into interplanetary space than in crossing the frontiers and barriers that separate groups and nations on this terrestrial globe. The new planetary, interdependent world which technology has created is rifted by hate. Yet its creator is utterly helpless to solve the problem of human alienation.

In the meantime, men become increasingly depersonalized, even dehumanized, and live in deadly peril of becoming pure robots. More and more they have to fight to maintain their position as individual human beings. Very apt is the title of a recent book by a contemporary French thinker, Gabriel Marcel, entitled, *Men against Humanity*. The individual person is being lost in the human race. There is something more: a spirit of conformity, a morbid quest of security, and a general lack of enthusiasm and conviction have become the order of the day in wide sectors of society, especially in the West.

How very far the process of secularization has advanced since the Jerusalem meeting of this Council in 1928! Some of us were present at the unforgettable sessions on the Mount of Olives. A famous paper was prepared for that gathering entitled "Secular Civilization and the Christian Task." It was brought home to us that the thought of our generation was being emptied of religious ultimates. Today it is not merely that God is rejected amid the general eclipse of the Divine. A state of mind prevails which is more radical than traditional atheism, the mere rejection of God. The whole human order, as we have known it for centuries is being

challenged and rejected. "I don't accept God's world," says a character in Dostoevski, speaking prophetically for very many of our contemporaries. "I return to God the entrance ticket of existence."

But in this attitude of revolt there is a strange, hidden hope, a beam of God's springtime, that pierces the contemporary gloom. There is being sounded a fresh call to courage and commitment, even on the part of those who deny God and read him out of the universe. If man is to be man, it is said, if life is to be livable, if mankind is to have any future whatever, men must create their own values and commit themselves to them with passionate devotion. It is being recognized by men like the Frenchman, Jean-Paul Sartre, that in a situation like ours today there is no alternative to commitment and a sense of mission. So it is not surprising that new absolutes begin to appear which have a strange aura of religion around them. Some of those absolutes are purely cultural, some, such as nationalism, are political in character.

Still another element in our present-day situation must be noted. In parts of the Western world both the Christian and the Greco-Roman tradition recede into the past. As Hendrik Kraemer, with prophetic insight, emphasizes, we are headed for the first world-embracing encounter of cultural ultimates. Speaking more concretely, we are witnessing in secular circles the birth of a strange new kind of religious consciousness. Why is this so? Because secularized man, being still man, cannot divest himself of an ancient human tendency to absolutize, and to create for himself idols towards which he takes up an attitude of religious devotion. In the meantime, ancient religions which had

been thought dead or moribund have suddenly become resurgent and have taken on new life. As a result of this, Christianity, Christians, and the Christian Church are now headed for the greatest spiritual encounter with the non-Christian religions since the days of the Roman emperor, Constantine. Thus it is, that, though it may be expressed today in very novel and unconventional ways, there begins to appear in the soul of contemporary man an intense God hunger, and a new sense of the need of mission.

In such a situation, and at such a time, the question takes on new meaning: "What is the Christian mission at this hour?" Let me attempt to answer the question. The time is clearly ripe to probe deeply into the theology of *mission*; it is no longer enough to raise questions regarding the policy of *missions*. This basic question confronts us: What does *mission*—*mission of any kind*—mean? What does it signify to have a sense of mission?

Mission, it may be said, is the dedication of life to promote something which is regarded as having supreme value. A sense of mission may be born within an individual or a group in one of two ways. It may have its origin in an experience of inner compulsion, or it may be derived from the voluntary acceptance in a feeling of being called to action, of a mandate which is issued by a recognized superior authority. In each case where a sense of mission is real, an individual, or a group, becomes the willing and devoted servant of a task which has been accepted, whether that task be to embody an idea, to be loyal to a cause, or to give allegiance to a person. Where mission becomes real, men are the joyous and obedient serv-

ants of something which they regard as bigger and more important than themselves, whether that something be a great Idea, a great Cause, or a great Being. Let me go further and say: *A sense of mission is not only an important historical or psychological phenomenon in the lives of men, it is of the very essence of life itself.* Men become truly alive when they know who they are and what they stand for.

If this is what mission signifies, if mission and servant are inseparably conjoined, what is meant by *Christian* mission? *Christian* mission is the voluntary and joyous dedication of life to promote an idea or a cause which is inseparable from loyalty to Jesus Christ, who is himself both the Truth and the Life.

We are now ready to explore the theme of *The Christian Mission at This Hour*. There is in the Christian religion what may be described as the *Mission Quadrilateral* which has four closely related but clearly distinguishable aspects. The four constituent aspects of the Christian mission are these: (1) The Mission of the Christian Faith; (2) The Mission of the Christian Man; (3) The Mission of the Christian Group; (4) The Mission of the Christian Church. Let us consider these in turn.

I. THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

If a discussion of the Christian faith and its mission is to be realistic and relevant, it must be undertaken today in an entirely new context. This context is a new manifestation of the religious consciousness of mankind, or at least of a fresh interest in religion. Here is the strange paradoxical fact. In

a world which, according to every appearance, is thoroughly committed to secularism, it is being recognized that the religious consciousness of man is both a universal and a potent fact. Men tend to think and live religiously, even when they pursue purely secular ends. In Communist ruled countries, for example, those in authority are forced to recognize that religion is no mere opiate which was injected into people by sinister social groups who were interested in their enslavement. It has become clear that religion is a dynamic force which even a Communist government must take into account, a force which it must conciliate, and, where possible, use for its own purposes. We, therefore, have the paradox of Communist rulers becoming the patrons of religion.

What is still more striking, however, is the current revival of the old religions to which I have already referred. Buddhism is becoming a markedly dynamic force in Ceylon. Hinduism is resurgent in India. In this great continent of Africa a new defense of Animism is being undertaken and, in consequence, a fresh sanctity is being attached to many ancient customs which were in process of disintegration. The resurgence of these old religions is closely related to nationalism. New significance is being given to everything belonging to the heritage of a people.

These ancient faiths, moreover, are developing a sense of mission and becoming missionary; some of them, like Hinduism, are becoming missionary for the first time in their history. In many instances they are even changing traditional emphases in order to become more relevant to the cultural mood of today, and especially in order to meet the demands of the new nationalism to

which each becomes related. Among intellectuals in particular a new interest in the old faiths is developing. Not long ago the Hindu philosopher, Radhakrishnan, boasted that "Eastern religions aim at producing heroes and saints; Western, men that are sensible and happy."

The new awakening of man's religious consciousness in our secularized era, and the resurgence of the old religions are closely related to the quest of freedom. This is natural, for the fundamental notion of religion is freedom. Buddhism offers freedom from existence. Hinduism offers freedom from unreality. A new brand of religion in Western countries offers freedom from futility. Christianity offers freedom from the bondage of sin, as guilt and self-centeredness. The belief that some desired form of freedom can be attained through religion underlies the reborn interest in religion on the part of many people who in former generations would not properly be called religious. Putting the matter in another way, religion and God are being subtly used by contemporary man to promote his own interests, or the interests of his nation. In every instance, the particular form of religion to which men have recourse in their quest for freedom is derived from some particular perception of reality. In all religious commitment an ultimate perception or choice is always involved.

This brings us immediately to Christian faith and its mission. Here, too, an ultimate choice has to be made, a primal decision has to be taken. The question is asked: Who or what is God? Is God merely the highest value? For some forms of religion God is just that, and religion consists in devotion to the high-

est value or to the ultimate truth. But in the Christian religion God is not the highest value or the ultimate truth; he is rather the source of all truth and value. He is a Living God who speaks and acts, a God who entered, in human form, into the time process to save men from their sinful self-centeredness. By reconciling men to himself and to one another, through death and resurrection, God makes them his servants to build a community called the Church, whose mission it is to proclaim the Good News of God and prepare the way for the coming of his everlasting Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

Thus Christianity takes its departure from the perception and affirmation of a living, speaking, and acting Deity who himself engages in mission. The God of the Christian religion is a missionary God.

An insight of that great Frenchman, Pascal, into the core of the Christian religion, which came to him in a profound religious experience, is very timely and relevant in the situation which confronts Christianity today. For Pascal, the ultimate reality which confronts man is not an Idea God, "not the God of philosophers or savants," but a God who entered into history, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ, the God who won the personal loyalty of that great scientist, philosopher, and saint and became his God forever.

There is a Christian thinker of our time, an Anglican layman, H. A. Hodges, who re-echoes the thought of Pascal in very similar terms.

"I shall contend," says Hodges, "that Christian thinking proceeds on a presupposition of its own which I shall call *the Abrahamic presupposition*, or *Abra-*

hamic theism. For the New Testament insists over and over again that Abraham is the model for Jew and Christian alike and that the true Christian is the spiritual child of Abraham, that is, one whose attitude towards God is the same as Abraham's was . . .

"Abraham," Hodges goes on, "is the story of a man who has committed himself unconditionally into the hands of God; a man who does what God asks of him without hesitation, however paradoxical or self-contradictory it may seem, and who accepts God's promises however mysterious and incredible they may appear. It is by virtue of this unconditional self-commitment to God that he has won the title of the friend of God."

Here is a crucial fact about which we must be quite clear. The starting point of the Christian faith is not a reflective idea regarding Deity, nor a haunting sense of the Divine, nor a passionate devotion to some ultimate value, but a response to God who disclosed himself redemptively in the history of a people, the children of Abraham, with whom he entered into covenant, and who finally revealed himself in a Person, Jesus Christ, in whom he became incarnate.

In the Christian faith God's missionary movement towards man culminates in a Person. It is no exaggeration to say that *Christianity is Christ*. "Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is and of what man through him may become." This affirmation was made thirty years ago at the meeting of this Council, held on the Mount of Olives. It is in Christ that the true nature and mission of both God and man are revealed. Here is the glory and, at the same time, the scandal of

the Christian religion. The God of our faith and of the Christian mission is a God who showed himself to be an extrovert, whose nature as love became manifest by the fact that he *so* loved that he gave his Son, his own very selfhood. God came into history, not as a celestial summer Tourist interested in the aesthetic, or as a Playwright who staged a tragic drama, or as a Judge and Avenger of the deep-dyed sins of man. He came to be involved in man's humanity. In human flesh he died for human sin, and rose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven to reconcile all things to himself.

The story of what God did for men in Christ, and can do today in men who through faith commit themselves to Christ, is the Gospel, the *Kerygma*. This Gospel of the action of God in Christ, Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, and Coming again, is to be proclaimed to all men everywhere. This is the *mission* of the Christian faith. What is proclaimed in this Gospel is not a true doctrine or a sound principle, but a Person who is himself the Truth. The great objective of the Gospel's proclamation is, in full loyalty to the express Commission of Jesus Christ himself, "to make disciples of all nations," or, as it might also be expressed, to restore wholeness to a broken humanity.

The salvation of men, which it is the mission of the Christian faith to accomplish through the Gospel, can best be described in terms of the restoration of human beings to holiness of life, that is, to wholeness in their lives. Men who are saved recover likeness to God, receive the filial spirit of the sons of God, and voluntarily and joyously dedicate themselves to the service of God, thus becoming God's servants. To unify once

again the divided kingdom of man, so that God may become King in the lives of men individually and corporately is the goal of the Christian Gospel and the mission of the Christian faith.

The full rich meaning of Christian mission is most luminously and adequately communicated by means of a classical but forgotten Biblical image. I refer to the *image of the servant*. The servant image, I have no hesitation in saying, is the essential image of the Christian religion. It is the image which sheds the truest light upon the mission which God set for himself in history. It is the image which illumines the mission of Israel as a people. It is the image which lights up the mission of Jesus Christ himself, as well as the mission of Christians, both individually and collectively.

In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings are called God's servants. They do his will and carry out his purposes. Israel as a people was to fulfill its destiny under God by being God's "servant." We read in Isaiah, "He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified . . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth!'" (Isa. 49: 3, 6.)

In the New Testament, the servant image offers the most adequate interpretative principle for the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. In the thought of St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians, "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, *taking the form of a servant*." The Son of God became the Servant of God in order that he might fulfill the mission of God. Throughout his entire earthly life, Christ's strong

sense of Sonship with God moved him to act joyously as the Servant of God. He knew that he was one with the Father, and that he bore the Father's likeness, yet he said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." In the Upper Room, the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus had a vivid awareness "that the Father had given all things into his hands." He knew that his hands were regal hands, to which the scepter of universal dominion belonged by right. Nevertheless, he borrowed a towel and did a servant's menial act. Jesus was intensely conscious that he had "come from God, and was going to God." He knew that his lot was set by nature in the orbit of Deity. Nevertheless he moved towards humanity in the "form of a servant" to wash and dry the grimy feet of his astonished disciples. He thereby performed an act which was associated in the minds of his followers with that of an Oriental slave.

It was to fulfill the mission of the "suffering Servant of the Lord" that Jesus Christ handed himself over to his enemies and died upon the Cross, from which he continues to reign. It was because Paul, Christianity's greatest convert, accepted the lordship of the Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Christ as worthy of his utter allegiance that he begins his great Letter to the Romans with these words: "Paul, a *servant* of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God." The servant image may well be called, as indeed it has been called, a "bridge category." It serves to unveil the inmost nature and glowing passion of a God who in order to fulfill a mission took the "form of a servant." This same image

also provides a pattern and a norm whereby individual Christians, missionary societies, and the Christian Church as a whole may learn how to fulfill their God-given mission.

II. THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN MAN

The Christian mission must primarily, and even ultimately, be expressed by individual Christians. There can be no substitute for personal witness.

What does it mean to be a Christian man? What does it signify to be a man at all in any real sense? When is man truly man? Man is truly man when he is God's man. He begins to fulfill his human destiny when he commits his life to God, when God becomes his God, and he voluntarily and joyously becomes God's "captive," God's Servant. This is said with due regard to the sad fact that there are hosts of Christians who betray the Christian faith.

But when all is said, and full penitence is expressed, Christians are nevertheless the only people who can achieve manhood and womanhood in the deepest, truest sense. In New Testament language they have been called to be "saints," that is, to be God's men and women. They constitute a "new creation in Christ Jesus." Christ becomes the Lord of their life. They become his friends. They give proof of their friendship with Christ by doing his will, exulting in his service, joyously taking the form of servants.

The world-wide community of Christians today has no greater need than that everyone who bears the Christian name should be a Christian in truth and develop a sense of mission. The Christian mission can never be fulfilled in

this era unless Christians take their relationship to Jesus Christ and his Church with the same seriousness that people who are not Christians take membership in the secular group to which they belong. Very often, unhappily, we Christians who belong to the traditional denominations, both in the older and the younger Churches, do not compare favorably in the quality of our Christian devotion with members of the so-called "sects" whom we are apt to despise. How often we look down our ecclesiastical noses at those fellow Christians with an air of superiority and disdain. But let us face the sobering New Testament fact. All Christians are called to be "saints," and should take their calling seriously. Otherwise it will go ill with the Christian mission at this hour.

But if Christians are called to be "saints" in this profoundly New Testament sense, what does it mean for them to engage in mission? Every Christian should be a witness to his faith at all times, in all circumstances, and in every environment. He must seek every opportunity to bring men into allegiance to Christ. For that reason *he must have an intelligent grasp of his faith*. He must take seriously what St. Peter enjoined. "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you." (I Peter 3: 15). He must have a simple working theology. He must also feel in his heart the inner constraint of Christ's passion for men. This love passion, through which Christ continues his work, uses a Christian man as an instrument, a medium, a servant, whereby it becomes communicated to other people.

The Christian in the fulfillment of his

mission *must also identify himself closely with the people to whom he bears witness and with their environment.* By the way in which he makes himself a sharer in their life, with all its problems and sorrows, he will win a right to be heard. His strategy of identification, however, will involve neither an air of condescension in dealing with other people, nor an uncritical conformity to the kind of life they live. His aim will be to restore human brokenness, and to create spiritual wholeness. For the salvation which is the supreme objective of the Christian mission is spiritual health, the restoration of true humanity in the lives of men and women.

Never, however, can the Christian mission as here described be carried on effectively unless two conditions are fulfilled. First, the Christian laity must realize that they are called to an apostolate. Second, those who are professional servants of Christ and his Church, those in a word who are the contemporary equivalent and successors of the New Testament "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers," must realize and take seriously that their supreme task in the Church is, as Paul puts it in his Letter to the Ephesians, "to equip the saints for serving" (Eph. 4:14), that is, to make them true "servants" of Jesus Christ.

Ours is the era of the laity. Only lay men and women, by living lives that are utterly Christian in every secular vocation, in government and diplomacy, in industry and commerce, in the home and in the classroom, in the clinic and on the farm, can do what Christianity needs to do in our time to fulfill its mission.

III. THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN GROUP

It is natural for Christians to group together, both as an expression of the essentially social character of human nature, and in order, as members of a responsible fellowship, to accomplish some goal they have in common. From the origins of Christianity to the present there have always been the "two or three gathered together" in the name of Christ, to whom Christ assured his Presence. Some of the greatest movements in Christian history have been born in fellowships of this kind. In fact, in the history of the Christian Church, great new visions and crusading zeal have almost always been born in small groups of dedicated Christian people.

It was thus that the great missionary societies of the nineteenth century came into being. Missionary-minded people banded themselves together. They formed a society to secure and commission men and women for some missionary task, or to go to some mission field themselves. All too often official Church bodies have been more interested and successful in achieving *order* than they have been in creating and sponsoring *ardor*. They have tended in fact, to be suspicious of ardent spirits. Men and women of Christian vision and zeal have not infrequently found it difficult to fulfill their ideals of mission under the official sponsorship of the ecclesiastical organization to which they belonged. Hence, the independent missionary society.

Here is a fact which this Assembly cannot ignore. Some of the most famous of missionary societies in the Protestant tradition, and some that have been most loyal to the International Missionary

Council, and at the same time most creative in facing human needs on the great frontiers of the Kingdom, have been, and continue to be, independent of the Churches to which their members belong. I still recall how startled I was when I learned that none of the dozen or so societies organized by Anglicans to achieve some practical goal to which the members of the particular Society are dedicated, are officially related to, or controlled by, the Church of England. The same situation has obtained in very many Churches in continental Europe. The largest and most famous of European missionary societies have not been Church-inspired or directed.

On the American continent today, independent missionary societies are much more numerous than those officially connected with Churches. They also send many more missionaries into the *Oikoumene* than do the Church-related missionary organizations. The reasons for this development are complex. In some instances those organizations have quite unfortunately lacked a sense of the Church; in others they have lacked confidence in the dedication of the Church to mission. There has also been a fear that ecclesiastical control might stifle Christian initiative. Cases are not lacking in which outstanding young men and women of good education and dedicated lives have preferred to go into missionary service under the auspices of an independent or "faith mission," rather than relate themselves to a traditional Church mission board. They are afraid, especially in the new era of the "fraternal worker" and in view of the demand for specialized technicians, that they will have to sacrifice evangelistic opportunities. On the other

hand, many of those ardent missionary spirits withdraw from the real world where their lot is cast and so become quite irrelevant to it.

There are, on the other hand, some notable cases of organized denominations, in which the Church is literally the mission. This is true of the Mormon Church. It is no less true of the Pentecostal Churches. In many parts of the world today every member of the several Churches that make up the Pentecostal World Fellowship are not only committed Christians, but ardent missionaries. Thanks to Pentecostal zeal, the government of Chile recently paid a tribute to the tremendous social transformations which had been wrought in the Chilean Republic as a consequence of Pentecostal religious effort.

It is all too easy to think disdainfully and speak disparagingly of independent missionary societies, of "faith missions," and the rest. Many of these groups are accused of being uncooperative, and of showing themselves hostile to the Ecumenical Movement. In very many cases such missions do not form part of the National Christian Councils represented in this Assembly. There is a growing trend, moreover, for many of those societies to become integrated into a parallel organization. This should give us great concern.

Some reflections are therefore in order. In the Roman Catholic Communion, the many religious orders which carry on missionary activity in different parts of the world do so with full autonomy, and do not function under the direction or direct control of the Vatican or of the Roman Catholic authorities in any given country. It was a startling revelation, to which Protestant Church leaders in the United States

awoke some years ago, when it was discovered that the representatives of Roman Catholic missionary societies in America were convening for the first time in their history. It seemed incredible that in a great monolithic structure, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Church's missionary work should have been carried on by independent Roman Catholic orders, whose representatives had never met together to coordinate their work or to think through a common policy.

Think also of the monolithic political structure of all Communist states. Nevertheless, within a given state, the Communist Party itself functions autonomously and independently of the government as such. The Party, as a matter of fact, while not being directly controlled by the government in power, is the chief force that inspires and directs governmental policy.

Thought will be given at this Assembly to coordinating and intensifying the world mission of the Church. The question will be asked whether the traditional missionary movement as represented by the International Missionary Council should become more closely related to the World Council of Churches, the world body which represents the Churches as such and with which the International Missionary Council has been "in association" since 1948. It is of the utmost importance that we gain the needed perspective and ponder all relevant facts, in order that the Christian world mission in our time may be advanced and that every lesson which may be profitably learned from missionary effort past and present may be turned to good account.

Certain things are clear. First, no achievement of ecclesiastical order

through the fulfillment of all the great proprieties of Christian relationship as between foreigners and nationals, between native pastors and fraternal workers, can ever be a substitute for missionary ardor. Whenever a constituted Church body becomes indifferent to the Church's mission, a problem is created for those interested in mission. Wise counsel will then be needed if full justice is to be done to the proprieties of ecclesiastical order, on the one hand, and to the demands of missionary ardor on the other.

Second, the Churches and Councils which belong to the official Ecumenical Movement should not regard as necessarily unecumenical those missionary societies and Churches which have thus far been uncoöperative in the coordination of missionary effort in given areas of the world. Every possible effort should be made to treat the members of those societies as brethren in Christ, to seek opportunities to meet them and to learn from them, and also to disabuse their minds of certain very erroneous views which they hold with regard to the Ecumenical Movement, the Churches and Councils which support the International Missionary Council, and the World Council of Churches.

Third, a way must be found whereby missionary societies which have a traditional fear of ecclesiastical control in their missionary work, or who believe that Church bodies as such can never carry on worthy missionary activity, should find a place in whatever plan is adopted to integrate the historic missionary movement into a structure which represents the Churches as such. It would appear that patterns and experience are not lacking to ensure the

full independence of any given missionary group which relates itself to the International Missionary Council and to the Ecumenical Movement as a whole. On the other hand, we in this Assembly should see to it that the insight, zeal, and autonomy of such bodies are welcomed and cherished within the corporate expression of ecumenical unity. In this way a united front in the name of Christ and his Church will be presented to all Christianity's rivals in the world of today.

IV. THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

We come now to the Church as such and to its Mission. But what is the Church?

Definitions abound as to the Church's nature. Many of these definitions are rich and meaningful. Whatever more the Church may be, it is at least this, *the community of those for whom Jesus Christ is Lord*. The Church is community before it becomes organization. Today the Christian community is world-wide. Groups of Christian believers are found in every nation on the globe.

With more insistence and relevance than ever, the word sounds, *Let the Church be the Church*. When these words gripped me more than two decades ago, I wrote down this comment which I recently uncovered among some old papers. I would re-echo the same sentiments today.

"Let the Church *know* herself, whose she is and what she is. Discerning clearly her own status as the community of grace, the organ of God's redemptive purpose for mankind, she must by a process of the most merciless self-scrutiny, become what God intended

her to be. Nothing less than that, nor yet anything more than that. In penitence and in humility must the Church rediscover the meaning and implications of that word that comes to her from the earlier ages of her own history, 'to be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man.' This involves a revived sense of God as a real living God, the 'God of the whole earth' over against a God who is a mere idea, or a dialectical process, or a member of a polytheistic pluralism. This means concretely that the Church recognizes herself to be the Church of Christ, the organ of God's purpose in him. It must be her ceaseless concern to rid herself from all subjugation to a prevailing culture, an economic system, a social type, or a political order. Let the Church live; over against all these let the Church stand."

In those days the term "ecumenical," which today is so current, was just emerging. Now we begin to speak about "ecumenics" as the new science of the ecumenical. What does Ecumenics mean? Ecumenics I would define as: *The science of the Church Universal, conceived as a world missionary community, its nature, its mission, its relations, and its strategy*. The given in this young emergent science is the Christian Church as "a world missionary community."

For the first time in history, the Christian Church, as a result of the Christian missionary movement, can be spoken of as a world community, that is to say, a community which is found in token form around the globe. The contemporary task of the Church is to assure that wherever members of this community are found, they shall be missionary in word and work. It can-

not be emphasized too much or too often that *mission* is of the *essence* of the Church. It is the chief glory and goal of the Church's earthly unity that it should be a united front for missionary action. Such action should take place on all the frontiers of the world, and not merely the geographical frontiers; for every sphere where men live and work and suffer is an appropriate frontier for the Church's missionary effort.

The most luminous and dynamic figure with which to describe the mission of the Church is once again the servant image. It was the true destiny of Israel, the covenant people of God, as we have already seen, to accept her role as God's servant in order to become "a light to the nations" and carry God's salvation "to the ends of the earth." The Christian Church, amid all the diversities of her structural form, and underlying all the ecclesiological theories that seek to define her nature, is inescapably, as Paul said, the "new Israel." Being such, it is the Church's mission to be God's servant, his envoy, at this hour, to enlighten and disciple the nations of the world, and to lead all men everywhere into the community of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Let the Church be the Church! Let the Church in our time take the "form of a servant." Let it give fresh, dynamic, missionary significance to this classical Biblical image which needs to be recovered and re-defined in our time.

But, alas, in many ecclesiastical circles it is thought scandalous that the Church should be thought of as a servant. The servant role and emphasis is regarded as derogatory to the dignity and status of the Church. Is not the Church the people of the Covenant?

Yes, but too often the Church has gloried in her status as the *people of God* and has been too little concerned about being the *servant of God*. Pardon the irreverence: but too many Church people and Churches as a whole have, so to speak, chummed up with Deity. They have become God's supercilious patrons instead of his loving friends and his obedient servants. Friendship with God has been regarded too frequently as a treasured experience, a high distinction to be cultivated for its own sake. Sufficient regard has not been paid to the fact that Abraham, the classical pattern of friendship with God, embarked at the call of God upon a supreme adventure; that the Son of God exultingly took the "form of a servant"; and that Jesus affirmed categorically that his true friends are those who do what he commands them.

It is painful to think in how many respects, and in how many places, the Christian Church is becoming an absolute, an idol, an end in itself, without regard to its true nature and honorable mission as the servant of Jesus Christ. Yet, let there be no mistake about this, no claim to be the Church, no historical continuity, no unbroken tradition, no apostolic succession, no theological orthodoxy, no ecclesiastical unity, no political power, no liturgical pageantry, can be a substitute for the Church's missionary consecration, in the form of a servant, to the redemptive purpose of God in Christ.

And as regards those Churches which we call "Younger," no degree of autonomy, no measure of harmony, no attainment of all the requisites of self-government and self-support, can guarantee, still less be a substitute for, a Church's dedication to her missionary

task. The truth is this: The moment the Christian Church in any of its determinations begins to glory in anything that it is, or claims to be, and neglects to fulfill its mission in the form of a servant, this could happen. The Church of today as an organized structure could meet the fate of the ark and the temple in ancient Israel. It could go the way of the old Jerusalem and God would raise up out of the ruins "new children unto Abraham."

No, literally nothing that can be said about the Church, or claimed by the Church, will be of any ultimate avail if the Church neglects to fulfill its God-given mission. The Church's structure and doctrine, her liturgy and even her sacraments, fulfill their highest function, and express their deepest meaning, when they prepare the people of God to be the servants of God. The breaking of bread in the Upper Room at the Holy Supper, the Eucharistic Feast, was followed directly by the washing of feet, when our Lord took the form of a servant. Never let us forget the deeply symbolical significance of this fact. The servant image must be restored in our time. In the comradeship of the Church universal as a world missionary community, the older and the younger churches must catch the vision of the servant and assume the servant form. The Church must become afresh a pilgrim Church and engage in a new Abrahamic adventure. It must beware of identifying itself too closely with any culture or with any nation. It must not be ashamed to have elements of strangeness in the eyes of its contemporaries and be foreign to the standards of the world.

The pilgrim Church, on its Abrahamic missionary adventure into the

oikoumene, will seek to fulfill a three-fold mission.

First. *In every society and in every age the Christian Church has a prophetic mission to fulfill.* To be true to its mission the Church must radiate the light of God upon the world. It must set the life of man in the light of God. It must recognize that God is One and that he is interested in every phase of human life and welfare. It must proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, over the world and over the Church and over the souls of individual persons.

The Church is called to a *prophetic* ministry in contemporary society. Those Churches which are powerful and free in the nations where they bear their witness are particularly called upon to exercise a prophetic ministry. Let them proclaim to nations that take up a purely negative attitude towards Communism, and seek to meet the Communist peril exclusively in terms of missiles and military preparedness, that God is the sovereign Lord of all things. He who in the ancient days of Israel's history used Assyria, Babylon and Persia for the fulfillment of his purpose to be the "rod of his anger" and, perchance, to be his "shepherd," can use Communist states in the life of today for the same end. The problem of contemporary history and of human destiny is much more complex and lies much more under the judgment of God than appears to many naïve and shallow statesmen who control the destiny of great nations today.

Let the Church proclaim that in human relations, even among enemies, there can be no substitute for personal conference. Let the Church shout aloud that civilization, and all the nations that consider themselves to be civilized,

stand in need of forgiveness. Let the Church make unmistakably clear that even in international affairs, and despite the long record of failure around the conference table, there is still a place for the injunction of Jesus regarding a quality of patience and of forbearance in human relations which involves a "second mile" and the "seventy times seven" of forgiveness.

The fulfillment of the Church's prophetic mission is closely related to a true theology which should be at once Biblical, dynamic, and relevant to the thought problems of the hour. In this connection, literally nothing has happened in recent years that gives greater hope for the development of a true theology in the lands of the younger Churches than the gift which was announced this morning by Dr. Charles Ranson. Under the guiding light of the Holy Spirit, this gift can bring a new dawn in the development of theological education, and contribute to the preparation of a prophetic ministry for the Church Universal.¹

Second. *The Christian Church has likewise a redemptive mission to fulfill.* This mission consists in *mediating the love of God to the world.* The Church carries forward the mission which God himself initiated when the Son of God took the form of a servant. This is the mission in which God the Holy Spirit is still engaged in the world, and which he carries forward through the instrumentality of the Christian Church as the Body of Christ.

In the fulfillment of its redemptive mission, the Church must communicate to all men with both passionate conviction and crystalline clarity, the Gospel of the love of God in Christ Jesus. The proclamation of the Gospel, however,

must be more than mere talk. It must be communicated by deed as well as by word. No one can be an effective Christian witness if he is a mere talker. The Christian Church must make manifest the meaning and spirit of the Christian Gospel. Through the mediation of the divine love to meet human need, it must proclaim its message in ways which are related to the true welfare of men. The word must continue to "become flesh." The Church must be so sympathetic to everything truly human in the life and culture of a people that all that is good in their cultural heritage may be preserved and transfigured. The Church today must seek to do in many lands what Christianity succeeded in doing many centuries ago when it preserved what was best in the cultural heritage of Greece and Rome.

Finally, *the Christian Church has a unitive mission to fulfill.* It must seek to achieve and express that kind of unity which should mark the people of God, the servants of Christ, in the fulfillment of their mission to the world. Let the Church never forget that the true pattern of her unity is that oneness which exists between the Father and the Son. That divine unity, let us remember, the unity which marks the life of the Holy Trinity, is not a static, but a dynamic unity. The unity that exists in the Godhead, I say it with reverence, is a missionary unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together dedicated to a missionary task, and the unity of the Church becomes effective in the

¹ This refers to a gift of \$4,000,000 for the development of theological education in the lands of the younger Churches. Two million dollars were contributed by Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and two million by eight mission boards in the U.S.A.

measure in which the world believes that the Father sent the Son to be its Saviour and so takes seriously the Christian message of redemption.

Therefore, in loyalty to God's revelation of himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in holy dedication to God's missionary task, let Christians and the Christian Churches become "partners in obedience" and "fellow workers with God," that the world may be saved in the fullest Christian sense.

Let us never forget this: It is on the road of missionary obedience that the unity of the Church of Christ will be achieved and will prove most effective. It is on this road and only on this road that a pilgrim, missionary Church, which subordinates everything in its heritage to the fulfillment of its mission, will discover the structural form and appropriate organ which will best express its oneness in Christ and contribute most to its missionary service for Christ. On the road of the Church's missionary obedience the Holy Spirit will reveal the form of ecumenical or-

ganization which is most in harmony with the reality of the Church as a world community which seeks to be loyal to its mission and its unity.

To that end, "let the leaders take the lead." Let them lead in such loyalty to the great Biblical tradition and to the spirit of Christ, that they and the Churches which they serve shall become servants of all. For the Christian Church will never be so truly the Church of Christ, and never so relevant to the needs of this generation, as when it takes the "form of a servant," even of a "suffering servant." Let the Church of Christ in every land be willing to endure persecution and to risk ridicule as it serves God and men, inspired by the deathless hope that the kingdoms of this world shall one day become the "Kingdom of our God and of his Christ."

My brethren, may the work of this Assembly at Ghana equip us all, and the Christian Councils which we represent, to advance *The Christian Mission at This Hour*.

THE INCARNATE LIFE OF CHRIST

"The Son of Man comes as the herald of the rule of God in which the judgment of God on the sin of men is effected in its most drastic form—by forgiveness. The Son of Man comes as the bearer of this forgiveness; he comes to dispense it to men by relating himself to them, by being "the man for other men." And it is theirs as they receive it at his hands, by becoming related to him. He is the Man for God who claims men completely for God, and he is the Son of Man who imparts God completely to men. He is the nucleus or center through whom both the inexorable demands of the righteousness of God and the inexpressible grace of his forgiveness are disseminated through mankind. It was to be this center of humanity that he became incarnate as the Son of Man. He formally entered upon it at his baptism, and at his death he carried it to its consummation when he gave himself for us and said *tetelestai*, "It is finished" (John 19:30): The incarnation of the Son of Man was complete.

—GEORGE S. HENDRY, *The Gospel of the Incarnation*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1958, pp. 113f.