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THE RÔLE OF PRINCETON SEMINARY

THE primary and most important function of a theological seminary is to prepare heralds of the Gospel and shepherds of souls. This function is worthily discharged when the Seminary makes adequate provision for the progress of its students in learning and piety. For "religion without learning or learning without religion in the ministry of the Gospel must ultimately prove injurious to the Church." (Plan of Princeton Theological Seminary) Neither of these can be a substitute for the other in a Christian minister. He must possess those "holy affections," regarding which Jonathan Edwards said: "True religion in great part consists in holy affections." He must possess equally a clear understanding of God's revelation in Christ and of the implications of this revelation for life in its fullness and its every sphere. Princeton Seminary has been consistently loyal to this great insight of its founders which they transmitted in the Plan of the Seminary as a mandate to their successors.

Some seminaries, however, of which this Seminary is one, have a further part to play in the religious life of their time. In addition to discharging the task common to all seminaries, it is theirs to match in the sphere of evangelical learning the studies offered by influential graduate colleges in the several branches of secular culture. That Princeton Seminary should discharge such a rôle is inherent in its nature and consonant with its tradition. It is a rôle, moreover, which the Seminary has fulfilled with distinction at different periods during its long history.

The religious crisis that besets mankind today is a call to Princeton Seminary to assume once again its historic rôle. It should aspire to nothing less than a place of decisive leadership in the theological world. Many circumstances favor the fulfillment of this aspiration. New winds and tides of God are in motion. To begin with, theology is more needed in the life and thought of today, and is more earnestly studied, than it has been for many a generation. Evidence multiplies among high school boys and university students, among ministers and laymen, of a craving to understand the Christian faith and to possess a luminous and well-articulated system of belief. It is well that this should be so, for otherwise the Christian Church would run the risk of being out-thought by its new rivals, those totalitarian political systems which have assumed the rôle of churches.

It is not, however, theology in general that is needed most, but confessional theology, theology that is hammered out within the fellowship of the Church and becomes an instrument of the Church Militant at a time when new rivals challenge her claims. There are professors of theology who teach in independent seminaries or in the theological faculties of universities who today would welcome chairs in church-related institutions.

Still more significant is the fact that the theological tradition which is most relevant to the deepest needs of our time is the theology that is ordinarily designated "Cal-

THE CHURCH'S TASK IN THE REALM OF THOUGHT

Reflections on the Oxford Conference

JOHN A. MACKAY

WE are engaging today in the interpretation of three ecumenical conferences, two of which have taken place already, and the third of which will take place next year somewhere in the Orient. If I may be permitted to crystallize the significance of each one of these I would say that the Oxford Conference invites us to think clearly, the Edinburgh Conference to love dearly, and the Hangchow Conference, if and when it convenes, will lay upon us the necessity of acting redemptively. These are the three distinct tasks of the Christian Church: to achieve clarity in the realm of Christian thought, to achieve unity in the sphere of Christian life, and to act redemptively in the sphere of missionary action. The part that falls to me is to deal with the first of these three, to consider the task of the Christian Church in thought.

We cannot think of Oxford and its essentially intellectual tasks, because such they were, without thinking at the same time of Stockholm, its mother and predecessor, which convened twelve years ahead of it. The decade that intervened between Stockholm and Oxford marked a very decided change not only in the atmosphere of world affairs, but also in the intellectual climate of the Christian Church. Stockholm was all optimism. Things were taking place in the world of 1925 of such an inspiring and reassuring character that it appeared to many Christians as if the Kingdom of God were not very far in the offing. There was sounded such an urgent call to action that the necessity of thought was disdained. But between Stockholm and Oxford appeared many a

chasm in which today many fond hopes lie buried. Masks have been torn from man, and illusions have been dissipated as to what man may achieve in his unaided strength to create purity and unity in God's world. Stockholm ascended the summit of an unchristian hope, a hope that was too man-centered; and in the intervening period, right up to the threshold of Oxford, Christians and others were plunged into the abyss of an unchristian despair. An unchristian hope is a hope that makes too much of man. An unchristian despair is a despair that reckons insufficiently with God. Then man filled the picture, since then God has tended to disappear from the picture. What happened at Oxford was the irradiation of a merciless light upon human affairs, and the recognition of the fact that the total Christian task in thought and life and united action must be centered in the living God and His redemptive purpose and power.

As I apply myself to an interpretation of Oxford, what I say will be colored inevitably by what took place in the Section of which I had the honor to be Chairman, the Section on *The Universal Church and the World of Nations*. There were four other Sections. The first dealt with *Church and Community*, the second with *Church and State*, the third with *The Church and the Economic Order*, the fourth with *The Church and Education*, and the fifth with *The Universal Church and the World of Nations*.

It may interest you to know how international was the group of Chairmen who presided over these sections. Sir Walter Moberley, the leading educational author-

ity in Great Britain, was Chairman of the first Commission; Dr. Max Huber, a famous Swiss jurist, one-time President of the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague, was the Chairman of the second; Mr. J. P. R. Maud, Dean of University College, Oxford, chaired the third; Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin, President of Union Seminary, New York, the fourth, and my responsibility was to preside over the work of the fifth.

The intellectual tasks of the Christian Church vary according to the problems which Christianity has to face at a given time. Certain major problems are always with us, but other problems grow out of particular circumstances. I venture to say that the intellectual task of the Christian Church in our time moves within two foci. One is the fact—the terrifying fact—of world disintegration. The second focus is the fact, the inspiring fact, of world unity in Christ. In the center of chaos in the secular order stands the Beloved Community, the Church of the Living God, the one great hope under God for mankind at such a time as this. So let us consider the so-called thought bearings of these two facts, because after all a major task of thought is to clarify, to define, to state issues, to suggest solutions.

I.

Unity and Disintegration

We begin with the terrifying fact of a disintegrating world. A world order in civilization and culture is disintegrating, at the very moment when, in a physical sense, world unity has been achieved with the greatest degree of perfection. Physical unity is the background for spiritual dividedness. We have in our contemporary world three symbols of physical unity: the airplane, the radio, the electric motor. The airplane has virtually annihilated space so far as the men of today are concerned. Dr. John Finley, that prince of American

journalists, carries in his pocket each time he makes a pedestrian trip around Manhattan Island, an enormous watch, the only piece of matter that has soared over the North and the South Poles. From time to time recently the radio in our homes has brought to us echoes of songs from "Little America," or the sound of a lion's roar from the African jungle, or the words of the ceremony at which a royal pair were crowned in Westminster Abbey. Man has to all intents and purposes annihilated time as he has annihilated space, making all men contemporaries, Jew and Gentile, peasant and king.

On the other hand, the electric motor has so overcome the inertia of nature that if water-power is harnessed in the primeval forests of Africa or Brazil the mechanical amenities of Manhattan Island can be projected into the wilds. This is the kind of united world that forms a background for the terrifying fact of disintegration.

Disintegration in what respect? To begin with, in the realm of thought. *We have come to a moment in history when creative thought is virtually bankrupt.* No more attention is being paid to world views or ideologies. European youth have been closest to the modern crisis and they are not interested any more, they say, in mere ideologies. They are interested in realities and persons, but they are not interested in mere ideals. Ideals, they say, led them astray; they are will-o'-the-wisps which they followed in their romantic days. We have come to a time when, in the general sphere of culture, united though the world is in a physical sense, no single great luminous idea is regnant. The last was probably the conception of evolution, which, however differently it was interpreted, seemed to guarantee by a flowering, developing process much better days ahead. But how infrequently does one hear the world evolution on lip or pen these days! In its place you hear the word "tension";

instead of "development" you will read "conflict." "Conflict" and "tension" are the significant terms of our time, and neither one carries with it the necessary prospect of unity or beauty or order beyond. For conflict and tension, instead of leading to a new flowering order at the close of a dialectical process, may as likely end in pure chaos. Thought is bankrupt. In place of great thoughts we see emerge tremendous personalities, who summon men and women to follow them with unquestioning obedience.

There is *equal disintegration in the realm of ethics*. One could think, of course, of the virtual chaos in the sphere of individual ethics. But I think rather of universal ethics, those norms of conduct which mankind everywhere was beginning to adhere to, profess loyalty to, and guide conduct by. We remember how we ourselves thrilled at the word "human solidarity," or the magic word "freedom," or the inspiring word "brotherhood," or the noble, stimulating, martial word of "honor." But solidarity and freedom and brotherhood and honor are dead in the old sense, and with them international law, which is in shreds. It is no exaggeration to say that to all intents and purposes, so far as major obligations are concerned, international law does not exist. We have witnessed in these last days the distressing fact that no major parley will take action to counter the doings of a wrong-doer or to save a community or a nation from annihilation or suffering, if such action is not in accord with the advantage and the interests of the powers involved. No nation will stand by another in the name of solidarity or brotherhood or freedom or honor. Instead of that, major powers will take dishonor rather than act. We can speak no more even of the chivalry of a nation. No one, of course, wants war. But aloofness is no solution of an international ethical problem where innocent people suffer brutal violence at the hands of an

aggressor who is allowed to act with impunity. If human solidarity means anything, then the problem of violence run amuck must be faced in a positive, decisive, and constructive way, or we are sub-Christian.

What shall we say about the social realm? Strangely enough, *those very instruments which have achieved unity in a physical sense are disintegrating mankind in a spiritual sense*. You take the radio. Folks in our rural communities listen in. They hear the enunciation of principles and the proclamation of doctrines which, if they take them seriously, disintegrate the whole structure of their thinking and their living. And when thought is reduced to pictures, and the American cinema goes to China, to South America, and to India, there follows in its trail a disintegration of the communities that view those pictures. New standards of life, new ideas, new everything. The result, in many cases, is intellectual and moral chaos. Think what is taking place in our own country. As a result of the depression there are literally millions of disintegrated lives; multitudes are homeless and uprooted. They do not know where they belong, to the American soil or the American air. They are oppressed with a terrible sense of insecurity, of belonging to no one, to nowhere, of being just wandering stars, as it were, in our modern firmament.

And then *there is political disintegration*. Here only a word is necessary. We have become so accustomed now to recognize the fact, formerly recognized with great reluctance, that the new political systems are at bottom religious faiths, which usurp the rôle of churches. National Socialism has a sense of world mission as truly as Communist Russia had and continues still to have to some extent. It would seem as if the world were to engage in new wars of religion, more terrible and more challenging than anything it has ever known.

Beyond that *there is disintegration in the religious realm*. I am thinking of disintegration in the Christian religious realm. Take, for instance, Christian thought in relation to the disintegrating fact of war. The world is on the brink of war, and Christian people are not united as to what their attitude towards war should be. That was one of the facts that came out at Oxford. We recognized it frankly and put it down in writing, as you will see when the reports come out, that we are not united as Christians in our attitude towards war. Some utterly repudiate war as being inconsistent with the will of God, as taking issue with everything that the teachings of Jesus and the Cross of Christ have stood for. Others would be in favor of what they call "just war." By "just war" some mean war in the interests or defense of some international agreement. For others "just war" means a war fought in defense of great ethical or spiritual principles, or to save some people from annihilation by an aggressor. Still others would say that, despite all human effort, sin is so potent in human life that we can never expect war to cease until the Kingdom of God comes with power and the Lord returns. At the most crucial moment in history the Christian front is hopelessly divided with reference to this greatest of human evils. What does it all mean? This, that we are face to face as never before with the terrible fact of sin in human life and society. In other words, man has been unmasked afresh. We are all compromised. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; no individual can hold up a finger to another, and no nation dare feel self-righteous in relation to any other. For all are involved in the terrible reality of sin which our generation is rediscovering afresh.

II.

The Church Universal

Let us pass now to the other polar fact. As we survey human society in its disintegration, we seem to listen to that prophetic word, "Cease from man." (Isa. 2: 22) There is no human institution or project or program that offers an adequate center for reconstruction.

Whither do we turn? To an often ignored fact, ignored many a time by Christians themselves, the fact of the Church. While it is true, as the Oxford Conference recognized, that no human effort, however noble, can be equated with the Kingdom of God, there is nevertheless a divine society, a body of men and women who bear testimony to the reality of the love of God, and underneath whose diversity there is the spiritual fact of oneness in Jesus Christ. Oxford recognized that in a disintegrating world there is one center of spiritual unity, and that is the Church. *For the first time in history the Christian Church is found in all the great representative areas of the world.* It is therefore truly ecumenical in character for the first time in history, being coextensive with the inhabited world.

Being ecumenical, the Church is more than international. "The term 'international' necessarily accepts the division of mankind into separate nations as a natural if not a final state of affairs. The term 'ecumenical' refers to the expression within history of the given unity of the Church. The one starts from the fact of division and the other from the fact of unity in Christ. The thought and action of the Church are international in so far as the Church must operate in a world in which the historical Christian bodies share with the rest of mankind the division into national and racial groups. They are ecumenical in so far as they attempt to realize the *Una Sancta*, the fellowship of Chris-

tians who acknowledge the one Lord."¹ Oxford and Edinburgh were a testimony to the fact that non-Roman Christianity is at heart one in many an unexpected way without any compromise of positions. There is, indeed, a spirit and a hope within the Christian Church today which is not found at the heart of any other institution.

If it is to be truly ecumenical, the Church must transcend every boundary. It cannot be the Church if it perpetuates class distinctions within its membership. As the Church, it must rise above every human division and provide mankind with a true unity, the only unity, the redemptive unity, expressive of the purpose of God in Christ Jesus. Christian thought must therefore become increasingly preoccupied with the fact of the Church, its nature and its status, its function and its strategy. A church consciousness must be engendered in all Christians, not in order that the Church may become an end in itself or be regarded as such, but that all Christians may recognize that the divinely appointed order for the fulfilment of God's purpose in Christ in a disordered, perishing world is the Christian Church.

What does this involve in a practical way?

1. To begin with, *let the Church become a true pattern of unity.* How can Christians, members of the Christian Church, sons and daughters of the great Mother, seriously work for some communal expression in the life of society unless the Church itself is a pattern of the true meaning of fellowship? We can never express a divine pattern of unity unless, for example, we face the implications of unity in Christ in the economic realm. Not the Church's intervention in the solution of economic problems, but a demonstration by the Church that within its own borders those abnormalities and tragic facts which

help to disintegrate the world outside of us are non-existent will impress the world. Nothing should be permitted within the Christian Church in the sphere of economic relations that would be looked at askance in ordinary business. In other words, we have got to scrutinize in the light of Christ, in the light of the flaming eyes that once looked forth upon desecrated temple courts, every phase of economic life within the sanctuary. We must see to it that God and not Mammon is the Lord of the Christian Church. We must never permit that the policies of the Church should be dictated by Mammon or by any of his satellites, because to do so would be to dechristianize the Church.

But there is something that comes closer home. Christians can never work for unity among men unless Christian solidarity appears within the bounds of the Church in such a way that members stand by one another to the uttermost, whether they belong to the same congregation or are members of churches separated by wide racial or geographical boundaries. On the one hand, certain individuals must give up voluntarily emoluments that are not necessary for personal or family needs; on the other hand, the Church must take action to secure a legitimate living wage for every pastor, wherever situated. In other words, churchly solidarity must be such that a man who puts his life into the southern mountains or the rural areas of Nevada or New Mexico shall receive an income commensurate with his needs. Only so can the mind of Christ be expressed. If this is not done the Church has no right to address the world on economic questions. It would simply become a laughing-stock.

In addition to that, "Ecumenical solidarity implies that the Churches which are strong in resources should be ready to render help to those which are weak or in distress, anywhere throughout the world. But in every instance the required assis-

¹ *The Message and Decisions of Oxford on Church, Community and State*, Section V, Paragraph II, p. 77.

tance, whether money, counsel, or leadership, should be given without an accompanying claim to the right to dominate. Particularly the younger Churches, which are the fruit of the Church's missionary effort, have special claim upon the concern of the Christian Church."²

2. *Let each great Christian tradition examine itself in the light of sister traditions, and in the light of the common Christian faith.* One thing this ecumenical movement is doing to me personally is to stimulate me to dig down deep into the heart of our Reformed tradition. I have become increasingly convinced that we have in the tradition of our Reformed faith something that is true and everlasting, that needs to be said and re-said, something that is peculiarly relevant to the life of today, something that is greatly needed by the ecumenical movement in general. We are told that the Reformed family consists of about sixty millions of people, the largest body in Protestant Christendom. After all, the great doctrine of the sovereignty of God is peculiarly associated with our Reformed faith, and no doctrine is so tremendously relevant today as that doctrine is. The ecumenical movement will be best served by a real rediscovery on our part of what we are and what has made us what we are. Only in that way can we further the true interests of ecumenical Christianity at this time. Let us listen to the other great traditions and let them also listen to us.

3. *Let the Church achieve an increasing knowledge of its own nature and function.* The life of Christians must become more church-centered than it has been. The Church must become more and more the base of Christian action. One of the great facts that Protestant Christianity has forgotten is that the unit in the New Testament is the Church and not the isolated

Christian. We need a high doctrine of the Church, not in an ecclesiastical but in a spiritual sense. This must begin in the theological seminary. I do not believe that in a seminary there is any real place for the purely academic as there may be in a university. Seminaries should train up not cultured spectators but militant soldiers in the army of Christ. Such a unity between thought and action must be achieved that everything belonging to the great deposit of truth which is our heritage shall be made relevant to every phase of human life today. Out of this conviction has grown the conception of the new Chair of Ecumenics. This Chair will deal with the theology of the Church Universal, and will be concerned particularly with the missionary strategy of the Church in relation to the non-Christian ethnic faiths, and to the new political faiths of Communism and Fascism. All Church members must be made more intelligently and fervently aware of the world mission of the Church of Christ. We have a Communist Church and a Nazi Church and a Fascist Church, all of which are militant; the Christian Church must become equally militant in thought and life.

4. *Lastly, let the Church provide the insights that her members need for life in such a time as this.* Church members have to live their lives as citizens in a perplexing and disintegrating world. It is the duty of the Christian Church to do pioneering work in the realm of education in order to equip its members to be Christian men and Christian women in the kind of world in which they have to live. The time has passed when the Christian Church needs to do as much as formerly in the realm of mere general education. There was a time for that emphasis when, if the Church did not educate, nobody else would. The Church school must afford young men and women the needed insight into life and its problems, or else they will find those insights under other less favorable auspices

² *The Message and Decisions of Oxford on Church, Community and State*, Section V, Paragraph VIII, No. 3, p. 87.

and be swept into some crusading anti-Christian camp.

There is a new task for Christian education. The time has come when we must cease thinking that the needs of Christian education are met by a fragmentary knowledge of the Bible. Holy Scripture must be taught in a more systematic way. Instruction must be given in the great doctrines of Christianity. Laymen must be made aware of the movements of the Spirit in Church history, of the facts of Christian experience, of the crucial issues that confront Christianity today. Many of our Christian educators are, alas, at sea. They know how to teach, but they don't know what to teach, and what they teach, they teach in a hopelessly fragmentary way, so that our boys or girls do not know what Christianity is as young National Socialists and Communists of the same age know their respective systems.

We need a manual of theology of a simple and popular kind. Theology is clear thinking about God and life and man. If

we fail truly to educate the lay mind, the lay mind will find insight and inspiration outside the Christian Church. We cannot keep our people unless we speak to their minds and not merely in a sentimental way to their hearts. There is no use stirring up people on Sunday if they go back to work on Monday and have no great insight into the meaning of God and life and the relevance of the Divine Word for what they are supposed to do. And yet I believe the time is full of hope, for the Christian Church has never had such an opportunity as it has today in a disintegrating world. If we are worthy, this will be the century of the Church. It may be it is true the century of a martyred church. But the Church has always been strongest and most vital and relevant when drops of martyr blood fell into the open furrows of the world. A descent into the Valley of the Shadow has almost invariably been followed by an open grave and a new dawn. It shall be so now as ever.