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The Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry

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The Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry.

The almost unprecedented amount of discussion which the press of the country allots to the report of the undertaking known as the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry seems to demand that in addition to the brief appraisal of the report in our last issue our journal devote an article to this subject. The book which constitutes the report, having the title *Rethinking Missions* (published by Harper and Brothers), is now being spread far and wide and will quite likely be a prominent factor in religious debate for some time to come. The foreword informs the reader of the origin of the whole project. In January, 1930, a number of laymen, all belonging to the same denomination, met in New York and spoke of the diminution of interest in Foreign Missions at home and the many grave problems facing mission boards and missionaries in the field abroad. Laymen of other denominations were invited to come and join in the study of the situation. "As a result, seven denominations, each unofficially represented by a group of five men and women, joined to constitute the thirty-five directors of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry. These denominations are Baptist (Northern), Congregational, Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian Church in U. S. A., Protestant Episcopal, Reformed Church in America, United Presbyterian. The chairmen of the denominational groups form an executive committee of seven." It was resolved to make an exhaustive survey of the whole missionary enterprise, not, however, through the boards, but through special agencies, so that objectivity might be insured. The cooperation of the boards was asked for and given, as the foreword tells us. The inquiry was limited to India, Burma, China, and Japan. What the commission thought essential was, first, the assembling of all pertinent facts and, secondly, the proper evaluation and interpretation of these facts. To obtain the facts, the Institute of Social and Religious Research was employed, which sent a number of trained research workers to the fields mentioned, and after devoting about a year to this part of the undertaking, by September, 1931, had printed reports ready to be utilized in the second step of the inquiry, the evaluation and interpretation of the facts. This task was entrusted to a commission of fifteen people, most of them belonging to the laity, all of eminence in their respective fields, who, sailing from New York in September, 1931, visited the missions in the four countries and, with the charts and remarks of the research workers before them, endeavored to arrive at pertinent conclusions. The points receiving special attention through subcommittees were: The Mission and the Indigenous Church; Primary and Secondary Education; Higher Education; Literature; Medical Work; Agriculture and Rural Life; Industrial Developments; Women's Interests; Administration and

Organization. "The method of work was to hold group conferences in the larger cities with representative bodies of missionaries, Christian nationals, and non-Christians and then to disperse for the more intimate conversations which a large group cannot carry on." (P. XII.) Since it is this so-called Commission of Appraisal which composed the report, its *personnel* ought to be given here, especially because the identity of the members and the positions which they occupy serve to explain more than one feature of the report. The members are:—

Dr. William Ernest Hocking, chairman; Alford Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. Dr. Frederick C. Woodward, Vice-Chairman; vice-president of the University of Chicago. Dr. Clarence A. Barbour; president of Brown University. Mr. Edgar H. Betts; business man and banker of Troy, New York. Dr. Arlo A. Brown; president of Drew University. Dr. Charles Phillips Emerson; Professor of Medicine and dean of the Medical School of the University of Indiana. Mrs. William E. Hocking; founder of Shady Hill School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Henry S. Houghton, dean of the Medical College of the University of Iowa. Dr. Rufus M. Jones; Professor of Philosophy at Haverford College. Dr. William Pierson Merrill; pastor of the Brick Church in New York. Mr. Albert L. Scott; president of Lockwood Greene Engineers, Inc., New York. Mr. Harper Sibley; lawyer and business man of Rochester, New York. Mrs. Harper Sibley; religious leader and speaker of Rochester, New York. Dr. Henry C. Taylor, agricultural economist of Washington, D. C. Miss Ruth F. Woodsmall; specialist in work for women, Y. W. C. A., New York.

The Summary of Principal Conclusions appended to the report is valuable for quick orientation. It contains ten paragraphs, which we endeavor to condense in as few words as possible. 1. Missions must be continued; but there is danger that through adherence to aims and methods "which impede the communication of living insight" the success of missions will be thwarted and even their usefulness be ended. 2. The aim of missions to-day must be "to seek with people of other lands a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and word what we have learned through Jesus Christ and endeavoring to give effect to his spirit in the life of the world." 3. Evangelism must not be exclusively stressed; social work must be looked upon as one of the legitimate functions of the missionary enterprise. 4. The good in non-Christian religions must be recognized; condemnation of these religions must be avoided. 5. The work of the missionary being so difficult and calling for such a great measure of devotion, boards should be more critical in their selection of candidates. 6. Ways must be found how people in the Orient that are followers of Christ without belonging to one of the present-day

denominations "may be regarded as disciples." 7. A policy of concentration of *personnel* and resources is urgently needed. There are too many weak Christian institutions and merely nominal Christians throughout Asia. 8. It is time that missions progress from the temporary stage of crude efforts performed in pioneer fashion to the exalted level where "relatively few highly equipped persons" carry on the work, especially through institutions for the study of theology and civilization. 9. As soon as possible responsibility for the newly planted Christian Church must be transferred to the hands of the nationals. 10. The commission believes that a "single organization for Christian service abroad" should be established "in place of the complex, costly, and duplicative machinery which now exists." There has to be a "new alinement of forces, rising above denominational and doctrinal barriers." From this summary the reader can easily gather the drift of the whole report, which, by the way, is a formidable opus of 349 pages.

In stating our view on this work, we need hardly say that there are some matters embodied in it which we accept without debate—matters which rather belong to the commonplaces of mission endeavor, such as the necessity of exercising great care in selecting missionaries and the desirability of placing control of the newly founded churches in heathen countries into the hands of the nationals as soon as possible. Certainly the great effort which was put forth in this inquiry was not needed to bring home these somewhat axiomatic principles to the Christians of the homeland. What we wish to remark in the first place is that we were amazed at the comprehensiveness and thoroughness and the vast machinery with which the inquiry was conducted. We observe here the application of the methods of big business to religious problems. Involuntarily our thoughts run back thirteen years or so to the enormous activities which were planned and in part begun when the Interchurch World Movement had been conceived, the prospectus of which "called for a united study of the world field, a united budget, a united cultivation of the home church, a united financial appeal, and a united program of work." (*Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*.) This movement as designed resembled a structure of truly gigantic proportions, but without an adequate foundation; and hardly had building operations begun, when the few timbers that had been put in place collapsed and the sheer folly of the undertaking became visible to all. In the inquiry before us, it seems, we behold the first step of a similar project; tremendous labors have been expended on a survey which looks to united efforts and a united program of work. What will happen when the second step is essayed? Repeatedly the commission speaks of the kingdom of God, the coming of which is to be hastened by what this inquiry seeks to accomplish. How little mere outward activity will usher in

this Kingdom, how absolutely its spread depends on the proclamation and acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is in the report left out of account. Is there really a big gap between the Jewish Zealots of the first century of our era, who impatiently and vehemently toiled and fretted and organized and fought to force the arrival of the Kingdom, and these modern promoters, who engage the wisdom and the talent of the day and think that by employing such heavy artillery they will be enabled to level the wall of Satan's fortress?

The laymen's report is a frankly unionistic document. It had its origin in the spirit of unionism, and this spirit it would like to put on the throne in the mission-fields. What it desires to help establish is stated, besides in the summary, on page 318 ff., where the need of unity on a comprehensive scale is dwelt on: "We believe," says the commission, "that thoughtful Protestants will not longer insist upon imposing a particular theology and polity upon the Christians of Asia." Hence it proposes that denominational differences, which until now quite generally prevented the various Christian bodies from uniting in their missionary endeavors abroad, be disregarded and that by all the denominations willing to cooperate a council be organized "for the administrative direction of missionary effort in all fields. The functions of the council should include the formulation of general policies for their representatives on mission-fields, the appointment of executive officers, field directors, and by confirmation of all field *personnel*. The executive officers should be salaried specialists. . . . They should form a cabinet of executives. . . . Field directors should supervise the work of regional divisions. . . ." For the denominational boards there will remain the task "of interpreting and promoting the work of Foreign Missions among their own churches in America. . . ." What is outlined here is a replica of the Federal Council of Churches, invested, however, with vastly greater authority and powers than the original. Doctrinal differences are blithely ignored.

The report here, as elsewhere, fails to take into account the majesty of the divine Word, which must not be added to nor subtracted from if we wish to be faithful to our God and Savior. In its view, apparently, the truth that a little leaven of error will leaven the whole lump may safely be disregarded as long as this course will help to make the leaven large and cohesive. The view which a convinced Lutheran will take of this part of the report is evident at once. Since it provides that he connive at, and assist in, the promulgation of teachings which he rejects as unscriptural, he will refuse to be identified with it. But as the commission consisted of men of differing religious beliefs, what other kind of report could be expected?

Still more serious than the error just pointed to is the evident elimination of the sacrifice of Christ from the Christian message and

the substitution of the so-called social gospel in its stead. The authors of the report indeed say that they do not wish to deny the uniqueness of Christianity; but that which really makes it unique, the great and glorious truth of the vicarious death of Christ, is simply suppressed. The "spirit" of Christ is lauded, and it is stated (p. 58) that "through Jesus and through such wills as His God works throughout human history, bringing men toward unity in love which is universal in its sweep." But what of the tremendous truth that God was in Christ and reconciled the world unto Himself and that He has given to us the ministry of reconciliation? On this subject the report is ominously silent. It is not unfair to say that in this document the cross of Christ is taken down and hidden from sight and that the only thing left our Lord is a lecture platform from which He can proclaim the Sermon on the Mount and other discourses that have to do with the life of the Christian. What is presented here is simply the old rationalism which seeks salvation in purity of character and good works.

It is the same rationalism which moves the authors to sponsor the idea that one of the chief concerns of missionaries must be recognition of the good which the religions of non-Christian peoples contain. The report actually discusses the question whether the aim of Christian missions should be to let Christianity supplant the opposing religions, and its answer is an unmistakable, though somewhat veiled, negative. Witness these words, p. 37: "So far from taking satisfaction in moribund or decadent conditions where they exist within other faiths, Christianity may find itself bound to aid these faiths and frequently does aid them to a truer interpretation of their own meaning than they had otherwise achieved." In brief, the authors hold that Christianity may be admitted to be *prima inter pares*, but it must not be conceived of as being the only true religion. If this view should universally prevail in the world, the days of the Christian Church would be numbered. Think of the results if this opinion should be transferred from the printed page into the life and endeavors of the missionaries, not only, as is the case now, by a minority, but by a majority or all of them! Buddhists, Shintoists, Brahmans, and perhaps even Mohammedans, would receive such missionaries with open arms, because they would be strengthened by them in their inherited idolatry. Fraternal gatherings would take place, with much talking and planning about the abolition of war and other evils, but the glory of Christian missions, the message of the redemption of Christ, would be forgotten.

It is sad to contemplate that not all the Christian journals of the country utter strong words of protest against such a pernicious conception of Christianity and that some, like the *Congregationalist*, not only approve of the document, but express surprise at the stir

which is caused by it, the paper mentioned observing that what the report voices has in its chief aspects long been held by the mission board of its church-body and by others of its prominent members. There are sharp words of criticism heard in certain quarters. For instance, the United Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions is reported to have declared: "We repudiate any adherence to, or any sympathy with, the report wherein it is a deflection from the fact that Jesus Christ is the only and eternal Son of God, who made atonement for the sins of men by His death on the cross, who arose from the dead, who is eternally alive, who by the presence of the Holy Spirit controls and energizes the Church in its divine mission to all mankind." What is distressing is that members of the United Presbyterian Church belong to the committee of thirty-five that initiated and supported this inquiry and, furthermore, that such expressions do not come from all parts of Protestantism in the United States. This leads us to say that the Laymen's Report is symptomatic above everything else, showing the hold which Modernism has come to have on the body of the American Church. Viewed in this light, it is a reminder to all who love the old Gospel to gird their loins and to bestir themselves, because the forces of unbelief are threatening to sweep the country.

W. ARNDT.

Archeology — the Nemesis.

(Continued instead of concluded.)

II. Refuted Claims of Historical Inaccuracies.

The second function of avenging archeology has been the tearing down of that amazing scaffold of theories on which a skeptical criticism has sought to reconstruct the Biblical narratives according to the blue-prints of its tendential theorization.

Perhaps the most ruthless of the three higher critical procedures of attack on the Scriptural record is the unequivocal assault upon its historicity. Under the patronage of rationalism it became the conventional procedure to make the point of departure in the discussion of Old Testament literature the unabashed contention that these Hebrew writings were replete with errors, inaccuracies, contradictions, anachronisms, and other telltale evidences of late authorship. If any one of the classical authors even incidentally suggested a reminiscence which could be twisted into a conflict with the Hebrew Scriptures, this was paraded to illustrate the alleged historical fallacy of the Old Testament. With this purpose in mind all the extant writings of early Greek and Latin authors were gleaned for negative material, their statements marshaled in apparently formidable array, and the whole indictment distorted under an extravagant conception of the validity of such ancient history.