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## THE FAITH BY WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES

By H. H. FARMER, D.D.

THAT the statement of 'the Faith by which the Church lives' was fashioned by the section which was responsible for it, and later accepted by the whole Meeting at Tambaram, under a profound and continuous sense of the tragic situation in which mankind finds itself to-day, is evidenced not only by the explicit statements of the opening sentences, but also by almost every paragraph within it. It is unmistakably a document which has been hammered out 'in the presence of disasters and forebodings'—to use its own phrase. The historian of the future, having no other information, would find little difficulty in dating it from internal evidence alone.

This being so, some may feel disposed to exercise caution in reading it. They will be on the watch for one-sided emphases, for statements in which the 'dateless' sanities of the Christian faith are lost in the clamour of the contemporary scene, in short for a theology of emotional reaction rather than of sound thought. Such apprehensions, we may say with confidence, are without foundation. The content of the document itself is sufficient to allay them; but, apart from that, there are two reasons why it should be approached with expectancy rather than caution. In the first place, it was wrought out by a group in which the widest differences of national, cultural, geographical, ecclesiastical, theological background were represented. Ample correctives to one-sided statements or false emphases were operating all the time. One would wish to emphasize the word 'corrective.' Correction is not the same as neutralization or cancellation. All were conscious that diverse and partial insights were not being merely slurred over in order to achieve a mere outward semblance of unity, that there was being given to the group as a whole, through the process of discussion and drafting, a fuller grasp of

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the Faith and its profound and critical relevance to these times than was possible for any one individual or sub-group in isolation. Any desire, if there were such, to find merely accommodating formulas vanished in a living realization of the truth, not infrequently lost sight of by argumentative theologians, that in these grave matters there is no light apart from the Fellowship of the Spirit, which is the Church. This leads to the second reason.

We may ask, when is the Fellowship more likely to be 'of the Spirit,' more likely to be the organ of the truth of the Gospel—at a time of greater 'disaster and foreboding' or less? On the whole it is to be expected that it will be this at a time of greater 'disaster and foreboding.' For, apart from the fact that insight into the deep things of God and 'spaciousness and ease' seldom go together, the Spirit into whose fellowship the Church is called is the Spirit of Him whose saving work for mankind was wrought out amidst the agony and shame of the Cross. God's answer to the shame and tragedy of human sin was Christ crucified by it and in its midst, and it is to be expected that we shall understand the answer better when we are forced to realize afresh how frightful that shame and tragedy are.

A comparison of the statement of 'the Faith by which the Church lives' made at Tambaram with the statement of the Christian message made at Jerusalem ten years before affords some confirmation of these remarks. The Tambaram statement conveys the impression of being on the whole more deep-going in its diagnosis of the forces which are shaping the modern world, more trenchantly relevant in its message, more firm in its grasp of the central and distinctive verities of the Christian Gospel and of what these imply for the work and witness of the Church—in general, more adequate to its great theme. Perhaps one may put it best by saying that the Tambaram statement has, indefinably, more of the 'feel,' more of the tone and temper, of the New Testament. This is not to disparage the framers of the Jerusalem statement, some of whom were at both meetings. It points simply to the ten terrible years which have passed since the Jerusalem Meeting, and to the fact that the word which God has assuredly been speaking to His Church, as indeed to all

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The basic difference between the two documents, affecting all else, seems to be that there lies behind the Tambaram statement a more piercing and profound sense of the power and pervasiveness of sin, of the way in which it enters into and corrupts everything, including even those things which at first sight might seem to be not without promise for the betterment of human life. Not that the Jerusalem statement, it is hardly necessary to say, minimized the importance and centrality of the problem of man's sinfulness, but there is a difference between 'not minimizing' and 'maximizing.' The Jerusalem statement does not minimize; the Tambaram statement maximizes. There comes to expression in the Tambaram statement a poignant realization that so long as the problem of man's sinful alienation from God is not dealt with in the radical way in which the Gospel deals with it, it will only be of the mercy of God if the race does not continue to move, as it has seemed to do throughout the last ten years, into ever-thickening night.

This basic difference may be illustrated along four lines.

First, in respect of what at Jerusalem was conveniently called 'secularism.' Ten years ago the spread of a godless secularism was set forth as the most serious challenge to the Christian faith. Yet serious as the challenge was represented to be, and illuminating as it was to many of us at that time to have it brought home to us, the impression is irresistible, as we re-read the documents to-day, that the attitude we were invited to take up to it was somewhat over-hopeful and tolerant and polite. The buttons were not off the foils. Though secularism was presented as the chief enemy, the conflict with it was not pictured as in any sense a life-and-death matter, a war *à l'outrance*. That such secularism was a manifestation of a deep-seated alienation from and rebellion against God, whilst certainly not denied, was nevertheless not emphasized. What was emphasized was rather the true values which were declared to reside in certain aspects of secularism, and the necessity of re-interpreting the central truths of Christianity in order to do justice to them.

Yet, clearly, if the human nature be that there could hardly be a tion of his sinful alienation fraught with disastrous secularist mind, no matter reason or another display this is so, and that the Jerusalem statement is nearly deeply enough; it is basic premisses about God taken us. Because man God, secularism in the secularistic indefinitely. the religious impulse though not understanding amidst the relativities of of so-called 'higher value' ism, it creates for itself a nature being what it is— happens the sin which is God takes on a new and with the most potent end. The false gods of nations fore, not what those who would fain declare themselves under the stress of difficulty for the time being the are rather the necessary itself.

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Yet, clearly, if the final truth about the ultimate secret of human nature be that man is made for fellowship with God, there could hardly be a more complete and obvious manifestation of his sinful alienation from God, one therefore more fraught with disastrous consequences for mankind, than the secularist mind, no matter what fine qualities it may for one reason or another display. Events since 1928 have shown that this is so, and that the Jerusalem Meeting's diagnosis did not go nearly deeply enough; it did not go as deep as Christianity's basic premisses about God and man ought perhaps to have taken us. Because man in the depths of his being is made for God, secularism in the nature of the case cannot remain purely secularistic indefinitely. Sooner or later, in one way or another, the religious impulse pervertedly asserts itself. Hungering, though not understanding its own hunger, for a fixed centre amidst the relativities of this world, starved on the thin gruel of so-called 'higher values' offered it by the prophets of secularism, it creates for itself false absolutes, and must do so, human nature being what it is—created by God for God. When this happens the sin which is the cause of the original defection from God takes on a new and sinister power, for it reinforces itself with the most potent energies resident within the soul of man. The false gods of nation, race, class, *Volk*, Leader are, therefore, not what those who still cling to their scientific humanism would fain declare them to be—the result of an uprush under the stress of difficult times of crude instinct, submerging for the time being the light of reason and knowledge; they are rather the necessary and inevitable sequel of secularism itself.

This deeper understanding of secularism in the light of what has come out of it, does not, however, involve a repudiation of the insistence of the Jerusalem statement on the 'values' which are to be discerned in it, or rather in the lives and purposes of some of its proponents. Rather, what it says in effect is that we now see that secularism in the nature of the case cannot preserve its own values, for no values are safe if man's fundamental problem is unsolved. The movements which are sweeping

the world to-day are in many ways inimical to the values of secularism at its best; they rest on blind faith and unexamined dogmatism, and are violently intolerant. It may be part of the Church's task to-day to secure these values which secularism cannot secure for itself. Yet to do that it must see to it that it does not itself, after the modern fashion, become one more dogmatism amongst the others. On the other hand, it cannot surrender the note of authority and conviction with which it announces a Message given of God Himself for man's salvation. There is a problem here, indeed a whole constellation of problems, which requires earnest thought and discussion. It was not discussed at Tambaram, but it could be discerned lurking more than once in the background. It is the same problem as that discussed by M. Jacques Maritain in the book recently translated under the title *True Humanism*.

Second, in respect of other religious faiths. The convictions which emerged at Tambaram with regard to other religious faiths were parallel with those just indicated with regard to secularism. Indeed, perhaps the greatest difference between the Jerusalem and Tambaram meetings is to be seen precisely in this: that whereas at Jerusalem other religions were aligned with Christianity over against secularism, at Tambaram they were aligned with secularism over against Christianity. Just as it was more clearly seen than at Jerusalem that secularism, no matter what fine things might be discerned in it at any one time or in some individuals, is only rightly judged when it is placed in the context of man's total and tragic situation as a sinner deeply alienated from God, so also it was more clearly seen that other religious faiths are only rightly judged when they are judged on the same basis.

The discussion of what should be the attitude of the Christian faith to the great non-Christian religions was vigorous and prolonged, and by no means confined to the sections commissioned to consider that question. This was due not merely to the sharp challenges contained in Dr Kraemer's book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, which had been issued to all delegates, but also to the fact that we were all, I

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think, conscious of groping our way towards a deeper understanding of these matters even when we were by no means inclined to accept Kraemer's theses without reservation. Such progress as there was towards a common mind was along the line already indicated. It was seen that the great non-Christian religions must be judged not by incidental fine qualities and insights which may be discerned in them (this on the whole was the attitude adopted at Jerusalem), but as complex, powerful, all-embracing systems or organisms of belief, praxis, culture, morality and so forth, which hold and shape the whole life of those who have part in them. Considered as such systems or organisms, considered, that is to say, as totalities—which is to consider them as they actually are in their impact upon men and women—they are in a very real sense all wrong, and must be all wrong—despite, we repeat, incidental and isolated rightnesses—for the reason that they leave (and must leave, being without Christ) the basic problem of man's existence unsolved: the problem, namely, of his alienation from God through sin. Built upon another foundation, organized around another centre, they are radically and totally different; to say this is not in the first instance to make a judgment of value, it is merely to make a statement of plain fact.

From this point of view there can be no question of any of these religions evolving into, or merging with, or being in any sense that is of the least consequence, forerunners to Christianity. They can only be declared to be radically discontinuous with it. They are all in their total, complex, comprehensive, powerful hold upon human life manifestations of man's unsaved state as a sinner and rebel against God. The only possibility is for a man to leave the one system and become incorporated in the other, to find his total existence built on an entirely different foundation, organized around an entirely different centre. That foundation or centre is God's historic act of Incarnation in Jesus Christ 'for us men and for our salvation.' Or, to put it differently, it is an experience of the need and the fact of forgiveness, through Christ, so radical, so penetrating, so relevant to every aspect and relationship of life, that the difference between the old faith

and the new can be expressed only by some such metaphor as a new creation or a new birth.

Where the Meeting remained still divided was on the question of what all this implies concerning those elements in non-Christian faiths which, without qualifying the judgment upon them as total systems just set forth, seem, when taken in isolation and judged by Christian standards, to be not without nobility and truth. This might seem to be a purely theoretical question when once it is granted that in any case man's real problem, or let us say God's real problem with man, is left unsolved by other religions, that therefore they suffer in a very real sense total condemnation at the judgment-seat of the Saviour. Yet in practice the answer given to this question is apt to affect the temper and method of the missionary's approach to his task; also the question can be a source of real difficulty in the inner life of those who relinquish the religion of their fathers for the profession of Christian discipleship. Just because the religion into which they were born has been, and is, such a pervasive and all-inclusive totality or system of life, there is bound up with it instincts and impulses which it is certainly not the business of Christianity to depreciate or condemn—love of one's own people, reverence for its past and its great personalities, joy in its highest achievements. The problem along this line becomes particularly acute when the ancient religion of a people is used by its leaders in the interest of a rising tide of national feeling and aspiration. At this point also the problem, as was found at Tambaram, gets perplexingly mixed up with the problem of indigenization.

So far as resolving finally differences of view on this matter is concerned, the Tambaram Meeting hardly registers any advance on that at Jerusalem. The Meeting divided again into those who affirmed that there is to be discerned in the highest things in non-Christian religions evidence of God's active presence and of some response of man to it, and those who were unable to affirm this. Yet though the divergence remained unresolved at Tambaram as at Jerusalem, it was perhaps clearer what the underlying issue is and along what lines further thought should proceed.

It was noteworthy that the views just indicated spread in the sphere of the non-Christian activity. They picture time to break through to a not altogether failing; from God's side because a second view, on the other hand, such phrases. They present non-Christian faiths as the and pathetic efforts to reach all, the negative, somewhat left Himself without witness suggest a direct activity is at issue here is the common discussion of recent years definition.

If it be asked why this to avoid the use of the Christian religions, the do so will detract from the God's revealing act in the revelation in terms of the they cannot in consistency indeed to be almost equal total and unclouded giving is Jesus Christ our Lord tion. On the other hand impelled to do so by what itself, namely, a disclosure out impartially towards receive, must be actively sought otherwise it would not discern its activity in dimly, have glimpsed and fact find Christ repudiated though doubtless He always

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It was noteworthy that those who took the first of the opposed views just indicated spoke in a way that implied God's activity in the sphere of the non-Christian faiths and man's response to that activity. They pictured, that is to say, God seeking all the time to break through the clouds of man's darkness and sin and not altogether failing; something, however little, gets through from God's side because God is active. Those who took the second view, on the other hand, seemed carefully to avoid any such phrases. They preferred to regard the finest things in the non-Christian faiths as the outcome of man's activity, his groping and pathetic efforts to redeem himself. If God was mentioned at all, the negative, somewhat non-committal phrase, 'He has not left Himself without witness,' was preferred to any that might suggest a direct activity and intention of revelation. Clearly what is at issue here is the concept of revelation, which, despite all the discussion of recent years, seems still far from any satisfactory definition.

If it be asked why the representatives of the second view wish to avoid the use of the term 'revelation' in relation to non-Christian religions, the answer seems to be that they fear that to do so will detract from the utter, incommensurable uniqueness of God's revealing act in Christ. In other words, they seem to define revelation in terms of that uniqueness, and having so defined it they cannot in consistency use it elsewhere. Revelation seems indeed to be almost equated with Incarnation, with that act of total and unclouded giving of Himself on the part of God which is Jesus Christ our Lord. Anything less than that is not revelation. On the other hand, those who take the first view feel impelled to do so by what they regard as given in the Incarnation itself, namely, a disclosure of God's nature as active love going out impartially towards all His children. Such love, they conceive, must be actively seeking to make itself known at all times, otherwise it would not be true to itself; why then hesitate to discern its activity in those instances where men, however dimly, have glimpsed and lived by truths which they do not in fact find Christ repudiates if and when they come to know Him, though doubtless He always judges them and cleanses them of



error and sets them in the new context of His own reconciling power?

Obviously the word 'revelation' is being used differently in these views and calls for further explication.

Third, in respect of the relation of the Christian message and witness to social questions. On the theological side this question passed over into the question of the meaning of the Kingdom of God and of the eschatological hope. All these issues, though doubtless in the background, are not explicitly referred to in the Jerusalem papers; but they are referred to in the Tambaram papers and they figured largely in the discussions of certain sections. One reason for this explicit emergence, we may surmise, was, as already indicated, the deeper realization that has come during the last decade of the sinister power, the deep in-rootedness, the infinite disguises, the inexhaustible versatility of evil in human affairs, enabling it to wrest every apparent progress to its own ends. 'The beast in man has broken forth in unbelievable brutality and tyranny,' says the Report of Section I. No one to-day, certainly no one at the Meeting, was disposed to speak with facile optimism about progress or about 'bringing in the Kingdom'; no one who does not realize that the Christian confidence in God's victory, if it is to endure and give unassailable peace and power, must have a basis other than anything that can be empirically observed in the historical process itself. It must rest on the transcendent and look to the transcendent in some sort of eschatological hope.

Though the Meeting was probably of one mind on this, it cannot be said that agreement was reached on the question how the doctrine of the Kingdom, particularly in its eschatological reference, is to be related to the task of the Church. So far as could be judged the general mind of the Meeting was that so far from there being any incompatibility between a direct and hopeful concern for the creation of a more just society in this world and the eschatological faith, both need to be kept in close relationship with one another, if the former is not to result in a secularization of the Gospel and the latter is not to result in quietist and remote other-worldliness. There was, however, a

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section of the Meeting which apparently would deny that any kind of direct interest in questions of social reconstruction has place in the task to which the Church is called. This, of course, is an old issue as between Lutheran and non-Lutheran theologies, and there is urgent need for more thorough-going discussion than was possible in the crowded agenda at Tambaram. Its importance in relation to the missionary task is obviously great, for it affects the presentation of the message, particularly to young people who, as in China and in other awakening nationalities, are usually, if they have any idealism at all, deeply concerned about the social reconstruction of their people.

Finally, in respect of the Church. Inasmuch as the Church was the main theme of the Meeting, it was to be expected that a great deal more should be said about it and about the sins and shortcomings of which it urgently needs to repent than at Jerusalem. Yet even so, one is conscious here as elsewhere that the realization of the fact of sin has in some degree a more piercing and poignant quality. This appears in two ways. First, in the way in which the Meeting, as it faced the cataclysmic events of these times and the challenges inherent in them, was again and again brought to see how disunited, how worldly, how at times unutterably petty, how complacent the empirical Church is.

In the presence of these disasters and forebodings we see the judgment of God's righteousness upon our society; but we see also His judgment upon our churches—so enmeshed in the world that they dare not speak God's full word of truth unafraid, so divided that they cannot speak that word with full power, so sullied by pettiness and worldliness that the face of Christ cannot be clearly discerned in them, or His power go forth through them for redemption.

These words in the Report of Section I were in no way the outcome of a sense that Christian people ought always in any case to make confession of their sins, but of a sense that in this case, in this situation, they simply must; and they must do so far more searchingly than ever before. Second, in the consciousness, which found expression more than once, that the Church's own vocation is essentially, and not merely incidentally in respect of this present age (though we have needed this present age to bring it home to us), of the same order as the Cross. By this is

not meant that Christians must be prepared for martyrdom, though that is not excluded, but that God's purpose for the Church, its essential constitutive principle, is that it should enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of its Lord and bear continuously on its heart, its prayers, its deeds the sins of mankind. Such a statement no doubt can be read and repeated merely pietistically, but there is no question that if its real meaning were grasped and acted upon, many of the weaknesses of the Church, of which we were made so painfully conscious at Tambaram, would begin to disappear. This is but to say that a Church which is not first, last and all the time a missionary Church is not a Church at all. It is not that the Church is not good enough, not sound enough in its theology, not united enough, to be missionary; rather it is not missionary enough to be good, to be sound in its theology, to be united.

H. H. FARMER

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