

**THE
CHRISTIAN MISSION
IN RELATION TO
RURAL PROBLEMS**

Report of the
JERUSALEM MEETING
of the
INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL
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RECORD OF THE COUNCIL DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

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IT is not too much to say that in general the tillers of the soil throughout most of the world's history and in most countries have been usually neglected, frequently exploited and many times despised.

The words 'rustic,' 'heathen,' 'pagan,' as over against 'urbane,' have indicated a point of view. We still have what is the conflict between rural and urban interests and cultures.

The modern city, based on industrial life, raises new issues and calls fresh attention to rural needs.

Here are nearly one thousand million rural people living apart, much out of the current of world life. They are conservative but stable.

We find ourselves, therefore, facing one of the world's problems—the place of the soil in society ; or, to put it differently, the need of building an adequate agricultural and rural civilization alongside an industrial and urban civilization. This task includes such problems as the best use of the soil, the plant and the animal to feed the future generations ; the securing of a reasonable economic return in order that there may be a fair standard of living among rural folk ; a life, both individual and community, that satisfies human personalities ; and participation in the great

aims of the race. At the present these ends are not attained in anything like full measure.

Shall this effort to obtain an adequate rural civilization result in a secular or a Christian social order? It is our old friend 'secular civilization' in a new dress, in the garb of the farmer. In few countries of the world, in the East or in the West, has the Christian Church really tackled this problem. And yet there is a great opportunity, perhaps none greater, facing the Church.

This problem makes some peculiarly strong appeals from the Christian point of view. First of all, there is the element of stewardship. The farmer is trustee of the soil, God's choicest material resource. Upon the farmer alone rests the task of passing these riches on to future generations. From the standpoint of service, the feeding of the world is so basic that it merits a fair return for an indispensable contribution. From the standpoint of Kingdom-building, the rural community must be made into a unit of the Kingdom of God, for this is the only way. We think of co-operation as a measure of the Christian spirit; we will have an access of power in solving world problems if the rural people are mobilized for such issues as true internationalism and world peace, sincere racial co-operation, industrial and political democracy, and co-operation for a Christian world.

Now, this opportunity which the Church faces is quite as great in the United States as it is in China; indeed, perhaps the East can teach the West in this particular in the next generation or two. In any event, it is a common problem for Christian forces.

The rural mission is not only a gesture of help toward greater skill in farming; it means reaching rural folk with the real Christian message in such a way

that that message may affect all their work in life. It proposes that Christianity shall command rural affairs.

The rural mission must be specialized, partly because of the apartness of rural folk, for even with modern means of communication they do live apart from the urban people, partly because there is such a thing as the rural mind which reacts to a particular environment, and partly because specialized and localized rural leaders are needed.

The forces available are not different from those available in the city, but they need specific direction.

1. For example, science must be applied in a special way to the economic and social problems of farming and rural life.

2. Rural government has many questions very different from those encountered in municipalities, counties and States.

3. Organization in its relation to agriculture and country life requires very different direction from that of organization applied to industry and urban civilization.

4. Also in the matter of education, whether we think of it in terms of schools for children and youth, or whether in terms of adult and mass education, questions of content of study, methods of teaching, use of environment, sources of funds, training of teachers, supervision—all bring us to particularized and special problems.

5. And then, finally, in the field of religion we have of course the same Christian message, but there are special aspects of it. It would seem that the farmer is peculiarly a worker together with God. He may plant and even water, but God gives the increase. He early learns the feeling of discovery of human limitations. He may become a fatalist, or, on the

other hand, he may realize his dependence on God. Moreover, the whole idea of the beauty of environment plays its part in rural life. These are merely examples of the specialized factors that enter into the way religion may permeate the rural community.

There are some essential requisites in the rural mission, such as a statesmanlike programme, complete co-operation of all churches within the areas to be developed, and especially trained and sympathetic leadership.

And then, beyond that, as fundamental in the whole affair, the community idea must be dominant. This community idea is good everywhere and for all agencies, and implies that the community shall be the centre of all activities, with the common good as the end and the co-operation of all individuals and all forces, the means. This would propose a full life for the whole local group, regarded much as an individual organism with its ills and its possibilities, its terms of health and of growth. We seek a redeemed community.

This community idea will have a peculiar effect upon social institutions as well as upon individuals for it will develop the community-centred school, the community-minded church and the community-building leadership.

Therefore, we seek the thorough commitment of the churches everywhere, East and West, to co-operation among themselves and with all other agencies, and to the task of demonstrating the need and the method of building a rural civilization that shall be Christian to the core, a task affecting two-thirds of the people of the world. Such a commitment is one of the unique opportunities of the Jerusalem Meeting.