

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

Report of the
JERUSALEM MEETING
of the
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ACCOUNT OF THE DISCUSSION

K. T. PAUL

WHEN the need of rural areas came up for consideration the Council faced a topic which was not before Edinburgh in any form, but which has come to the front less on account of changed conditions than by reason of a new realization of its importance. The subject was still *terra incognita* to many in the Council, perhaps to half its membership. Moreover, it holds no burning issue of controversy, at least not yet. It was, therefore, with some degree of uncertainty that those interested in the subject looked forward to the Council discussions. All such uncertainty was quickly dispelled by the brisk way in which country after country took part in the discussion with keen earnestness and firm conviction based on what was already extensive experience. The ground had, of course, been prepared by four very ably written papers—Mr William McKee and Dr Brunner assembling vast material from many parts of the world, and Dr Butterfield and Dr Jesse Jones setting out in a clear cogent way the principles which should guide missionary enterprise in dealing with rural needs. Still the discussion showed that the theme was of world-wide interest: the participants in the discussion represented China, France, South Africa, Belgian Congo, Korea, the Argentine, Japan and India, and on behalf of the ‘home boards,’ Germany and the United States, not to mention the ‘experts’—Dr Jesse Jones and Dr Butterfield.

After Dr Butterfield’s introduction, Mr K. T.

Paul of India outlined in a few pictures the deplorable condition of some 300 millions of the vast population of his country which could not be characterized otherwise than as economic and physical bankruptcy and pitiful helplessness in regard to even elementary civic rights. The Indian peasant is not only poor, he is hopelessly in debt and is consequently underfed and a prey to disease. By way of illustration Mr Paul gave the figure of 3·4 annas per day—the sum worked out by English prison authorities as the minimum sum on which health could be maintained, whereas the average gross income of a Madras peasant, on which he has to feed his whole family, is 4·5 as. a day; in Bombay Presidency the figure is 3·3 as., while in Bengal it is as low as 2·3 as. He agreed with Dr Butterfield that the necessity is not for increasing the earning power of the farmer but rather for making him better able to take care of himself in regard to health and all his other needs. Mr Paul pointed out also that the education of the young was not enough. 'The population has increased at such a rate that at the present rate of educational provision it would take forty years to provide schools for the present needs, without taking into account the increase of population in that period. The only hope of coping with the difficulty would be by adult mass education—an education including not merely the three R's, but the other practical things that a man has to know. Those in charge of mission administration should realize that the rural problem is a unity, and that the teaching of the mission must cover the whole of a man's life.'

China, Japan and Korea drew pointed attention to the fact that democratic development inevitably and very rightly leads on to gradual transfer of

political power to the peasant. 'Historically speaking,' Dr Lo said, 'the Chinese farmers have been known as the most industrious, patient, quiet and contented soil-tillers of the world. But all this is changing as a result of the tide of new thought and the changes of world events. The farmers are being constantly told by students and other sympathizers that they, like other classes of people, have a right to reap the full fruit of their labour and to enjoy life. . . . These farmers are being roused to a divine discontent and are determined to work for their own salvation.' Dr Axling drew a similar picture of the farmers of Japan, socially and politically alert and rebelling against a social order which deprives them of the necessities and comforts of life which their city brothers enjoy.

The result in both countries is a peasant movement and farmers' unions, such as the Red Spear Society and the Heavenly Gate Society in China—societies organized largely for self-defence against disbanded soldiers and military taxation. If, as Dr Butterfield had pointed out, the peasant is the trustee of the soil, which is the greatest asset of man, and if the peasantry form two-thirds of the world's population, this testimony from the rising democracies of the Far East lent very strong emphasis to Dr Butterfield's further point that rural civilization should be rendered in every point worthy of man's high destiny, and the country dweller should be made capable of bringing his point of view to bear on the greatest issues which come before his nation's attention. How fundamental, therefore, is the necessity to make rural civilization in every country absolutely Christian in every particular. As Mr H. H. Cynn of Korea said: 'Missionary thinking during the past decades has largely

been urban-centred. Education in the main has meant the preparation of young men and women for city life. Medical service has been designed, perhaps unintentionally, to suit city life and conditions. Even evangelistic work in its organization and method has been patterned after those of the cities of the West.'

The peasant movements are drawing attention to the problems of rural life, but Dr Axling and Dr Lo agreed that they are over-emphasizing the material aspect and are in sad need of balance on the moral and spiritual side. Dr Lo, referring to the clause in the constitution of the Farmers' Union in South China disqualifying Christian pastors or priests along with those who own more than 100 acres of land, stated that this showed that the Church had failed to win the confidence of the farmers or that what the Church really stands for had not been made known to them. The Y.M.C.A. in Korea has recently realized the need for a new orientation of its activities. Mr Cynn, the Secretary of the Association there, said that 'social clubs and literary societies must give way to agricultural co-operative societies and credit unions. Football and tennis must yield their places to the simpler and less expensive village games. Even the organization and method of the Church must be made so simple and inexpensive as to place them within the means of villagers.' Dr Axling finally said in terms of earnest appeal: 'Christian strategy demands that we dig in, take a long look, and lay siege to the whole life of the whole community. Only as we take into our hearts and our programme the whole life of the whole community will we be able to reach our goal, and this should be our policy whether it takes fifteen or twenty or thirty years to carry it out.'

To this whole diagnosis Dr Diffendorfer bore testimony from the angle of the home boards. His recent tour in detail over many mission fields in both hemispheres enabled him to speak with first-hand authority. 'The rural field,' he said, 'absorbed a major part of the missionary forces, time and money,' but it had been sharply borne in upon him that the results were not comparable with the investment. 'Regular ecclesiastical meetings were being held that had no effect upon the community and in the social life of the people.' And he went on to say, 'But the missionaries in the field are not to blame. What are the churches at home expecting from them? There is no place in columns of statistics for an enumeration of transformed social forces and influences. The home base has been demanding from the missionaries merely a report of so many baptisms each year. The home committees must let it be known that they are in sympathy with any steps that the missionaries may take towards a new and more vital approach to rural life.'

The corollary to all this became incontestably apparent—the necessity for specialized training for missionary candidates as well as for the nationals who engaged in rural work. Such training is clearly required because in most countries rural reconstruction movements are already afoot on a national scale, and high standards of technical skill will be demanded if the Christian enterprise is to make its ideals effective in the new life of the country. Dr Diffendorfer clinched this point very clearly when he asked the Council 'to look forward to great co-operative movements between the Church, Government, industrialists and agriculturists in the fields.'

Mr Pugh, from the Belgian Congo, contrasted the

situation in India with that in Africa. In Congo there are thousands of readers but hardly any books. One of the greatest problems of work in Africa is the provision of books in the different vernaculars.

The Rev. Gabino Rodriguez described a situation in the Argentine very unlike that in China, Africa and India—a country sparsely inhabited, with a large and steadily increasing immigrant population, a large export trade in fruit and wheat, and a government keenly interested in the progress of agriculture. Agricultural and national banks give all kinds of facilities for loans, and Government has established agricultural schools with well-equipped staffs to teach the best ways of cultivating the land and the most up-to-date methods of cattle-breeding. But there is little provision for spiritual ministrations to the people in the country and the majority are outside the churches.

Dr S. A. Moffett of Korea spoke in appreciation of the report on rural Korea prepared by Dr Brunner, which he said would be helpful to the churches and missions, especially with reference to economic and social conditions. He criticized a number of statements in the report which seemed to him to be incorrect. (These detailed criticisms were brought to Dr Brunner's attention, and he has given careful consideration to them in revising his preliminary report.)

Dr Lo of China voiced the thoughts of many when he said: 'The Church can do a whole lot to witness for Christ in social redemption. . . . If the Church should fail to do this at this critical time, when men are drawn away from Christ by theories which promise social and national salvation, the Church is certainly to be held responsible. For, after all, are we not our brother's keeper?'