

THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL

Is it True to Historic Christianity?

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The Foreign Missions Conference of North America is a participating body within the framework of the International Missionary Council, an organization which resulted from the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910, and was organized in its present form in 1920, "based upon a number of constituent member bodies, either associations of missionary boards and societies in the western countries, or National Christian Councils in the countries of the East, Africa and Latin America".

The Council's first world meeting was held at Jerusalem in 1928, and the second at Tambaram, Madras, India, in 1938. This 1938 meeting was attended by 471 persons from 69 countries and territories. This great ecumenical missionary movement is actively seeking to unite the scattered members of Protestantism into an effective co-operative fellowship which has before it the ultimate goal of organic union. What is the faith of this world movement of Protestantism?

Following the Madras meeting a report was issued, entitled: "The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the Meeting of the International Missionary Council". In the first chapter of the volume we find a report of one of the sections of the meeting, entitled "The Faith by which the Church Lives". This report contains a detailed statement of the Church's faith as seen by the International Missionary Council. The statement is introduced by a question: "What then is the Church's faith, not in its whole range and depth, but in its special meaning for our time?" This is followed by a 726 word statement formulating the Church's faith "in its special meaning for our time". This statement is very important and obviously was formulated with great care. Let us examine it closely.

First of all, we must object to the implication that the Church's faith, or Christianity, has a special meaning for our time different from what it had for other times. Our only infallible rule of faith and life is God's Word, the Bible, which

was completed nearly two thousand years ago and has not changed since. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever; the truth of the Lord endures forever; the content of the Gospel message is the same for every age and time. It has no different meaning for our time than it had for the time of the reformer Martin Luther, or the time of the apostle Paul. It may have various *applications*, of course, but it cannot have a special *meaning* for any one age or time.

Second, we should note that the doctrinal statement formulated by the International Missionary Council omits many fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith entirely; sets forth others in an equivocal manner, capable either of an orthodox or a modernistic interpretation; and includes some doctrines which are positively false from the standpoint of historic Christianity.

Naturally, many doctrines of Calvinism or the Reformed Faith, such as predestination, election, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace and the perseverance of the saints, are omitted. We should not expect to find them in a statement formulated by members of diverse denominations. But what is really astonishing is the number of *fundamental doctrines of Christianity that are completely omitted*. These are not doctrines of Calvinism, or Lutheranism, or Methodism, but fundamentals accepted by *all* orthodox Christians. The following are the doctrines omitted which certainly ought to have been included:

1. The Trinity, that the one God exists in three Persons, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.
2. The Deity of Jesus Christ.
3. The Virgin Birth of Christ.
4. The Supernatural Miracles Wrought by Christ.
5. The Substitutionary Atonement of Christ.
6. The Kingship of Jesus Christ.
7. The Second Coming of Christ.
8. The Deity and Personality of the Holy Spirit.
9. The Necessity, Inspiration and Infallibility of the Holy Scriptures.
10. The Fall of the Human Race in Adam.
11. The Doctrine of Original Sin.

12. The Necessity of Repentance for Salvation.
13. The Necessity of Adoption for a sinner to become a child of God.
14. The Resurrection at the Last Day.
15. The Judgment.
16. The Everlasting Punishment of the Wicked.

The statement does not deny these sixteen fundamental truths of Christianity; it simply omits them from its formulation of the Church's faith "in its special meaning for our time".

Now we may well ask ourselves if the faith of the Church "in its special meaning for our time" can get along without these sixteen basic truths, is it Christianity at all? If one or two of these doctrines had been omitted from the statement we might well assume that the omission was inadvertent rather than intentional. But can anyone seriously maintain that all sixteen of these fundamental truths were omitted by carelessness or accident? We should remember that the men who formulated this statement were not theological amateurs, but thoroughly trained experts from all over the world.

Is it unfair to assume that the omission of these sixteen doctrines was intended to avoid embarrassment or offense to modernists who no longer believe them?

Several doctrines are ambiguously stated, with the result that an old-fashioned Christian could interpret them in an orthodox way, while a modernist could interpret them in a "liberal" sense. When the Westminster Confession of Faith was formulated three centuries ago, accuracy was considered a virtue, and clear distinctions in doctrinal statements were sought and prized by all parties; but today we have the deliberate cultivation of vagueness, the careful wording of doctrinal statements in so general a way that they will offend nobody. In the statement under consideration we find a great deal of what appears to be studied vagueness. Some of the doctrines set forth in this vague, ambiguous way are the following:

1. THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION. The statement speaks of God's "creative purpose" and says that "the world is his and he made it" and that man was made in God's image; but it

fails to take sides in the controversy between the Bible doctrine of special creation and the currently popular theory of evolution. Any advocate of "theistic evolution" could accept what the statement says about God's work of creation.

2. THE DOCTRINE OF SIN. The statement speaks of sin in Pelagian terms, mentioning various forms of actual transgressions but omitting any reference to human corruption of nature. There is not the slightest suggestion that Adam's fall had anything to do with universal human sinfulness.

3. THE DOCTRINE OF SAVING FAITH. There is no suggestion that *Christ Himself* is the object of saving faith; rather, the statement makes Christ a mere *example* of faith, by the imitation of which the believer comes to have a faith in God like Christ's faith in God: "Through his faith and perfect obedience they come to trust the only true God". Nothing whatever is said about faith in Christ, except that John 3:16 is quoted in another paragraph. The faith described in the statement is not Christian faith in the orthodox sense, for it is not faith in Christ but only in God.

4. THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. This being a keenly disputed point today, the statement should certainly affirm belief in Christ's resurrection the third day in the same body in which he suffered, but glorified. It does nothing of the kind. Instead, it only says, "Through his risen and living presence, men who dedicate their wills to him become with him partakers of eternal life". Obviously any modernist who denies the bodily resurrection of Christ could agree with such a vague statement.

Some doctrines set forth in the statement are positively false from the standpoint of historic Christianity. There are at least two glaring examples of such heresies.

First, the statement sets forth the false doctrine of the *Universal Fatherhood of God*, with its corollary, the *Universal Brotherhood of Man*: "Man is the child of God, made in his image". It is true, of course, that man *was* the child of God when made in his image, at the creation. But the present tense is used: "Man is the child of God". This is simply false. Mankind fell into sin; the image of God was broken so that only

marred fragments of it remain today; unregenerate man today is *not* the child of God in the religious or ethical sense and cannot become the child of God except by *adoption* consequent upon faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Similarly, the statement speaks of men as "brothers in the family of God on earth". But the human race as such is *not* the family of God on earth, and has not been since Adam's fall. This is thorough modernism.

Second, the statement set forth the "*moral influence*" view of the atonement: "His suffering and death on Calvary bring them to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and assure them of God's pardon". This is the only reference to the atonement in the entire statement. Thus not only is the Scriptural Satisfaction Doctrine or "Substitutionary Atonement"—that Christ offered himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God—entirely omitted, but an essentially false theory of the atonement is put in its place. The "*moral influence*" view of the atonement is associated with the name of the New England theologian Horace Bushnell. In brief, it holds that Christ died, not to satisfy God's justice on account of human sin, but to melt the stony hearts of men by producing a powerful moral impression on them. This is essentially the view of the atonement set forth in the statement we are considering. Thus at the crucial point, the very core and center of the Gospel, the true doctrine of the atonement is omitted and a false doctrine put in its place. This is simply not Christianity at all, but an entirely *different* kind of religion; not a different branch of the same tree, but a branch growing on a tree of an entirely different species.

In a paragraph following the conclusion of the doctrinal statement, something is belatedly said about the Bible. It is affirmed that the Bible is the "instructor and sustainer of the Christian faith through the ages", and that special emphasis must be placed today on the nourishing of the life of the Church upon the Bible. These statements would be approved by the most radical modernist. The things the modernist would object to are all omitted: that the whole Bible is *God's holy Word*, a special divine revelation; that it is *fully inspired*; that it is

inerrant, and that the Bible and not experience or conscience is *the only infallible rule of faith and life*.

Surely it is clear that the system of religion set forth by the International Missionary Council is not historic Christianity but something else. In fact, it would not really be necessary to examine the statement in all its details to realize that there is something very seriously wrong with it. That appears in the very first sentence, which says: "We live by faith in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". No true Christian who ponders the matter will be satisfied with such a statement, for it is a subtle half-truth. A Unitarian would subscribe to it whole-heartedly; he would say: "We live by faith in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (and of all other men as well)". But there is one thing that a Unitarian would *not* say, and that is precisely what is left out of the foregoing statement: "We live by faith in *the Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father*".