Articles

Contributions
On the origin of IAMS

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This article has been written in response to the urgent request of the editor of Mission Studies for an account of the events leading to the establishment in 1970 in Oslo, Norway, of the International Association for Mission Studies and to the formal organization of the Association in 1972 in Driebergen, Holland. Because of personal involvement in those events I should have much preferred that someone else had undertaken to tell the story. However, as a modest contribution to the history of the study of mission in its co-operative and world-wide aspect the sketch which follows may not be without interest. 1

I.

IAMS has only a brief history, but a long past. A fellowship of this kind was envisaged more than three decades ago in the author's little book An International Institute of Scientific Missionary Research.2 Already six years earlier, in a paper read to a conference of Norwegian missionaries and mission administrators, the idea of such an institute had been advocated. Missionary research, it had been maintained, like missionary activity itself, by its very nature is international, or to be more precise, global in scope.

In the booklet referred to three aspects of the proposed institute receive special attention, viz. (1) the establishment of "an international association of missiologists (and others engaged in the scholarly study of missions)"; (2) the calling from time to time of "international conferences for the discussion of missionary subjects in a strictly scientific spirit"; and (3) the publishing of "a scholarly review of high standard".3

In the USA the re-actions to the proposal were throughout favourable. A valuable service, it was said, had been performed in raising this question.4 The plan, if carried out, "would be of tremendous use".5 Professor K.S. Latourette, Yale University, found himself heartily in accord with the project which he described as "sound and needed".6 R. Pierce Beaver, at that time director of the Missionary Research Library in New York, was even more enthusiastic. "We need an institute of the high quality you propose", he wrote to the author, "with the scope suggested, and with the international character which you desire". In a lecture entitled "Tools for the Study and Teaching of Missions", given at the inaugural meeting of the Association of Professors of Missions, Louisville, Kentucky, June, 1952, he quoted at length from the Oslo proposal.7

In Europe the institute idea was cordially approved by two leading Roman Catholic missionary scholars, viz. Professor Johs. Beckmann,8