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EDITORIAL

This month, the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches meets in Vancouver, Canada. "Jesus Christ - the Life of the World" will be the unifying theme of the worship, study groups and discussions attended by the 900 delegates and many others who will be there from 24th July to 10th August. In one sense, it sounds an arrogant title. How can Jesus Christ be said to be the life of the world in which his followers are but a minority? Or is the title more ambiguous than that, simply setting the person of Jesus Christ alongside the life of the world and viewing each in the light of the other? Or is it, as most would probably think, an affirmation of faith, that it is from Jesus Christ and under his lordship that the world will find its true life? In this sense it would be in line with the themes of Evanston, 1954 - "Jesus Christ - the Hope of the World" - and New Delhi 1961 - "Jesus Christ - the Light of the World".

To affirm life in this way, in a world where death by poverty is the fate of millions in the south, and the fear of death by mass destruction is the nightmare of millions in the north, is itself an act of witness. Yet strangely, perhaps more than with any previous WCC Assembly, there has been a marked lack of interest during the period of preparation in this country. This is certainly the case as compared with the months preceding the last Assembly at Nairobi in 1975. Of course, following Uppsala (1968) the WCC had been at the centre of acute controversy with regard to such issues as racism and there was no lack of ready-made publicity for World Council affairs. The media will no doubt be looking for sensations at Vancouver. We may trust our delegates to tell us the full story on their return.

Dr David Russell, like E. A. Payne and M. E. Aubrey before him, has combined his position as leader of the denomination with an active commitment to the ecumenical movement, which in his case has meant fifteen years' membership of the Central Committee of the WCC. In this issue, he gives us a vivid picture of the challenges and rewards, the frustrations and the excitement, of ecumenism at this level, and of the relationship between denominational allegiance and the search for Christian unity, of cultural integrity and the commitment to a community transcending all nationalities and cultures. For this article, so timely in view of Vancouver, and so honest in its recollection, we are deeply grateful.

There may not, at first, seem much connection between papers on seventeenth century Baptist books for children (H. Foreman) and the somewhat unsavoury goings-on amongst Baptists at Barnoldswick in the last century (K. G. Jones), and indeed both essays are included here on their own merits. But, as Dr Foreman points out, after 1662 we find children of dissenters increasingly being taught how to count money, reflecting the main direction in which "professions" now lay open to them. And as is all too clear from Mr Jones's account, by the mid-nineteenth century some of them were so intent on *making* money as to have tragic consequences for the so-called gathered church in one northern community. Once again we are brought face-to-face with the question of the relationship between puritanism, or dissent, and capitalism. Mr Jones points out, however, that the Barnoldswick affair refutes any simple identification between 'old dissent' and the rising middle-class on the one hand, and between newer Methodism and the working classes on the other. At the same time, one might add, what has for long been regarded as the well-established case argued by R. H. Tawney for the source of capitalism in Protestant religion, is now being questioned in some quarters. The local historian's role is, among others, to disconcert us when generalizations are handed on too readily.

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