

Editorial

The World Council of Churches

VIRTUALLY the whole of this issue is devoted to the theme of the forthcoming assembly in Nairobi of the World Council of Churches. This is evidence of the importance which we attach to this gathering. The contributors include the Bishop of Truro and Mr. Tom Wright, a young ordinand, who are two of the Church of England delegates to the assembly, and Bishop Stephen Neill who has an almost unrivalled experience of the church throughout the world and who was for a time on the headquarters staff of the WCC. The other contributors also have special competence in their fields. The general tone of the articles is critical, though care is taken to distinguish those things which may be commended from those which need to be queried. This approach represents the reaction of a great number of Anglicans to what has been happening recently in ecumenical circles.

Naturally we must face the question whether we are just criticising the WCC because it is the fashionable thing to do. There are of course those who dismiss all things ecumenical as popish, or protestant or modernist plots with a deep Satanic influence underlying them and treat Geneva as the modern Babylon. Such an approach is far from our intention. In a world where nations are inevitably drawing closer to nations it is necessary that there should be international organisations. When it comes to relations between churches in different countries it is important that these should also be interdenominational. We need a WCC, of that there should be no doubt. We also need a WCC which will represent the whole spectrum of the Christian world. That means, in the world of the last quarter of the twentieth century, that the 'SCM in long pants' image of a white North Atlantic talking-shop is totally inadequate. Some of the criticism directed towards the WCC can be seen, perhaps justly, as the rather hurt reaction of those who started something on premises which were quite inadequate for

what it had to become. The early ecumenical movement looked amongst other things for the reunion of churches. There has been some progress along these lines, but in the meanwhile the whole concept of 'the institutional church' has come under fire from all sorts of quarters and many people are finding unity by simply abandoning the ecclesiastical structures. It is an observable fact that some of the ideals which are formulated in a man's youth turn out to be irrelevant at the time that he has seems to have power to put them into effect. Much of the steam has gone out of the original purpose of the ecumenical movement as, after the acceptance of some of its ideals, it has advanced into a very different sort of world.

The 1960s and 1970s have seen a widespread awakening of the Christian conscience to the vast amount of evil and oppression that there is in the world. Amongst the reasons for this are the end of the colonial era and the growth to full independence of the third world countries who can now make their viewpoint known, and the development of modern communications which can bring vividly into the family living room what is happening in other parts of the world. It would have been truly amazing if white armchair liberals had not had their ideas badly shaken. The WCC is now one of the bodies which is doing that shaking. The alien character of some of its actions and pronouncements must be understood before they are condemned. It is at least possible that there are a number of truly prophetic notes amongst the jumble of ecumenical verbiage.

Our real complaint must be the tendency to a lack of balance. Almost every aspect of Christian truth has a complementary truth. This is normally because a thing may be looked at either from the divine or the human point of view, or either from the perspective of grace or of nature. No theological system has ever managed to get the balance just right in every field. The tendency of modern theology is to be too man-centred, to concentrate too much on nature and too little on grace. This is seen again and again in the words and deeds of the WCC. Never was it more important that the other side of the coin should also be represented and it is the task of these essays to try in some measure to represent it. They are offered in dialogue with the WCC and we should be glad to be able to print a reply to them. We cannot claim any finality for the views which are expressed here. But if the WCC does not officially take into account the sort of reaction which is expressed here, there is undoubtedly a great danger that they will be seen increasingly as an expensive irrelevance and that many of those who today in different ways are being renewed by the Spirit will become more and more alienated from the institutional structures. This could lead to a pietism just as unbalanced as the way of involvement which was repudiated. May God grant that Nairobi 1975 will give us something which is truly prophetic because the assembly is in touch both with living human beings and with the living God.

The New Puritanism

ONE of the most significant things to have happened in the last few years in Western Christianity is the emphasis on a simpler life-style. There used to be a good deal of emphasis in many churches on 'fasting'. In a Catholic context this tended to be centred on eating no meat on Fridays and in an Evangelical one on abstaining from alcohol. There were of course many who saw beyond the more superficial practices to something deeper. But the general idea was that it was good for you to deny yourself, which sometimes led to modern types of Pharisaism (Martin Thornton in his amusing piece in *The Great Christian Centuries to Come*, essays published last year in honour of Michael Ramsey, has even suggested that the Victorians needed to fast because of the huge meals which they normally ate!). One generation's type of self-denial has always been hard for the next generation to accept, and the new form of Puritanism has arisen through an increasing understanding of the needs of humanity. The problems of the environment in the widest sense have only been brought home to us firmly in the 1970s. So with a number of economic crises pressing upon us, many in the West, non-Christian as well as Christian, have seen the need for proper conservation of the resources over which God has appointed man as steward. There has been a sense of guilt that the rich nations could heedlessly enjoy a high standard of living while people were dying of starvation in other parts of the world. So now we have a human rationale for not wasting, a rationale which is also found to have divine sanction.

The most striking recent expression of Christian responsibility in this field is in the book by John V. Taylor, the new Bishop of Winchester, entitled *Enough is Enough* (SCM Press, 120 pp., £0.60). It is possible for the professional economist to criticise it, and it would not do, nor is it intended, as a blueprint for immediate action by every government. Changing economic outlooks and systems is a complicated and often a long-term business. But it is a truly prophetic call to Christians to get their priorities right and not just to do this as individuals. It has rightly enjoyed a very wide sale and it raises questions which must not be allowed to be forgotten. It is easy for the individual Christian to think that he can do nothing, but groups can work towards generating changes in public opinion and there is evidence that many people are sated with materialism.

The battle against some of the effects of modern permissiveness prove more difficult for many Christians, particularly of the younger generation. There is no doubt that many of the ideals of the post-war period of a society which was truly free have turned into nightmares. It takes no special insight to see that a great number of people are making a great deal of money out of things which, thinly disguised as art, are in fact destroying a proper basis for healthy relationships, particularly between the sexes. On the other hand there are very considerable

difficulties about censorship and it is largely the totalitarian countries which are free from the worst excesses of the public display of violence and sexual perversion. It is essential that there should be a good currency to drive out the bad and this is a major challenge for those Christians who have gifts in the realms of the arts. But even those who find some of the protest movements too simplistic should not sneer at them. Somebody needs to make a noise when things are wrong and many young people need protection from things which adult Christians may be able to withstand without too great difficulty.

The Churchman

WE congratulate the Rev. John B. Taylor, who is a member of the editorial board, on his appointment as Archdeacon of West Ham and hope that his new appointment will allow him to keep up his scholarly work on the Old Testament. Mr. Michael Benson has resigned from the board on his taking up a teaching appointment. We are most grateful for all that he did in the period of changeover of editors and subsequently. He is succeeded as secretary of the board by Mr. Michael Stoughton, who is Financial Secretary of Church Society and Secretary of Church Book Room Press. It is hoped that we shall soon be able to announce new developments in the administration of *The Churchman*. My move to St. John's College Nottingham is scheduled for the beginning of September and no editorial communications should be sent to Durham after the end of August. Meanwhile we continue in good heart, glad to hear from various quarters that *The Churchman* is meeting a need, but, like all our contemporaries, in urgent need of more subscribers.

Book Reviews

THIS issue must be unique for *The Churchman*, at least in recent years' in that it contains no book review section. This is solely due to the amount and importance of the material relating to the Nairobi assembly. I have been told on a number of occasions that this section is the most appreciated part of *The Churchman*, and we are grateful to our reviewers for the service which they provide. Readers may be assured that there will be a good book review section next time.

Apology

IN our last number the book *Paulus* by Rollo May (Collins, 1974, 113 pp., £1.95) was wrongly attributed to John Smith. In fact the review made clear who the author was.

R.E.N.