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# Nairobi: Action in Search of Reflection

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TWO MONTHS AGO from the day on which I am writing these words, the plane carrying the British delegates back from Nairobi arrived at Heathrow, depositing us exhausted back in an English winter after three hectic weeks of African sunshine and hard work. The World Council of Churches has now completed five Assemblies since its birth (four months before mine) at Amsterdam in August 1948. During that time it has been an object of hope and fear, of expectation and suspicion, for Christians all over the world. Any attempt to evaluate such an Assembly cannot but seem subjective, partial and even partisan, especially when it comes from one who is white, male, British and (now) ordained, and whose only favourable point—youth—is being steadily whittled away! No one delegate can possibly see everything that happens, or understand everything he sees; and nobody coming to the WCC for the first time can possibly grasp in three weeks the significance that many things have for those who have already borne the burden and heat of a long day. This account is therefore very personal: and I hope that any disadvantage due to my perspective will be offset by the advantage of occasionally seeing things through a fresh pair of eyes.<sup>1</sup>

It must be said first, and clearly, that (despite the gloomy prognostications of some) the Assembly was a thoroughly worthwhile and thoroughly Christian event: even when people were being outspoken or angry, they were very definitely being outspoken or angry Christians, and by the end the sense not only of human comradeship but also of Christian fellowship was strong indeed, even across wide barriers. Nairobi is a happy place: we were a happy Assembly. (It should be noted that the Press reports of 'sharp clashes' and the like were the reflection more of journalists trying to get up a story than of actual events.) Another contributing factor to this was the consolidatory nature of the work we did; it was a stock-taking exercise, finding out where we and everybody else had got to, rather than an attempt to move at high speed into uncharted theological or practical waters.

All in all, I enjoyed being at Nairobi, and I came away convinced that God still has great things for the WCC to do. The work of chronicling detailed events and reporting full statements and the like is being done by others:<sup>3</sup> my intention here is to examine some trends in the thinking of the WCC, and to point possible ways forward. In doing this I will take as basic the two preparatory paperbacks that were produced, *Uppsala to Nairobi*<sup>3</sup> and the *Work Book*,<sup>4</sup> and the addresses and reports of the Assembly itself.<sup>5</sup> After some preliminary comments on the theological method that is currently being recommended by some in the WCC, I will examine the questions of Unity and Freedom, which were highlighted by the Assembly's theme ('Jesus Christ Frees and Unites'), before drawing some of the theological threads together by looking at some of the ways in which our knowledge of Jesus Christ himself informs and gives shape to our ecumenical debates.

### 1. *Obedience—at the cost of Understanding?*

IF there is any one text which sums up the whole shape of the theological method current in much of the work of the WCC, it is James' insistence (Jas. 2: 17ff.) that 'faith without works is dead'. With unwavering determination the Council has rejected all forms of pietism or escapism that would allow Christians to go to sleep on their duty to live out the faith they profess. And this is not only thoroughly biblical; it is a matter of urgent necessity in view of the plight of many people in many parts of the globe, whose needs will not wait while the thoughtful world of theology debates in its armchair what sort of help would be doctrinally desirable. If we find it theologically inconvenient to listen to the cry of the Third World, so much the worse for our theology: it is good that this cry now sounds so loudly and frequently that even the often enclosed theological world cannot ignore it for long. As a result, there has developed what some have hailed as 'a new way of doing theology', which is referred to as the 'action-reflection' method, or the 'contextualisation of theology': this is a process of 'starting consciously with the immediate context, and then, through theological reflection, relating it to a wider context'.<sup>6</sup> Instead of thinking and thinking and then (much later) agreeing upon action, we must now do what we know to be right, and then go away and reflect about it. (In a way, this is precisely what I have done and am doing now: hence the title of this paper.) This point of view gains great strength from the consideration, frequently underlined at Nairobi, that to postpone action is in effect to decide for the status quo, at least for the time being.

The 'action-reflection' method is thus not to be sneezed at: but it is to be welcomed unreservedly only if it avoids the two basic dangers, theological and practical, that lie in wait for it. The theological danger is obvious: any stress on James 2 must be balanced by an equal

stress on (for instance) Galatians 3, if the danger of justification by works is to be avoided. As I have remarked elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> it is the continual danger of theology that it repeats the sin of Adam in putting the knowledge of good and evil before the knowledge of God, and refuses to admit that practical ethics are a necessary consequence of good theology and not its ground and origin.<sup>8</sup> This problem could be put in the form of a question: if we are to employ the action-reflection method, how do we know what action to begin with? And how could we know if that action were wrong? It is often assumed that it is self-evident what one ought to do, but this is an illusion caused by a failure to examine one's own presuppositions—indeed, by a failure to realise that one has presuppositions at all.<sup>9</sup> And this leads on to the practical danger: it is all too easy for followers of this method to become confused about their basic motives, and thus for their actions to become immune to a proper Christian critique. We find instead that various words which are used ostensibly only to describe possible courses of action have in fact a motivating bias built into them which changes them from mere descriptions into veiled commands or prohibitions. This familiar philosophical phenomenon is widespread in WCC circles, with the result that the two separate processes of describing a situation or action and evaluating it become inextricably confused. A classic example of this is to be found in part of the annotated agenda for Section III, which is set out as though it provided a simple description of alternative courses of action, while in fact loading the question all in one direction:

Why should Christians seek community with their neighbours at all? Why should they not be satisfied with community life within the Church? Does Jesus Christ want the Church to remain a group of believers called away from the wider human community just to be in communion with each other or does he want the Church to be a group of disciples seeking community with their neighbours in order to serve humanity and promote its unity and so carry out the original purpose of God the Creator of all?<sup>10</sup>

This sort of non-question does not encourage discussion, but rather stifles it.<sup>11</sup>

This problem is raised acutely when the underlying motivation for a particular action is in fact political—e.g. when the terms 'liberation' or 'Marxist' are used ostensibly to describe but in fact to commend or criticise. The danger here is that a situation may well be described as 'dehumanising' or an action described as 'just', with the intention that those words should carry a specifically *Christian* evaluation, while in fact the real scale of values which lies behind the description is political and not specifically Christian at all. The acid test, as we shall see later,<sup>12</sup> is that of political evenhandedness; if the motive really is Christian then all shades of political opinion are equally open to praise or blame. One-sided actions reveal one-sided motives: and the action-reflection method can sometimes serve to cover them up again by

misuse of language such as I have described. This is, obviously, not a fault of any particular political stance: it is a general danger to which this method can lead, and to which the warnings of Matthew 7: 15-23 are continually appropriate.

The logical and psychological tangles that result from such abuse of language are well illustrated by the discussions of violence. The word 'violence' itself and its cognates are sometimes used in a descriptive sense, sometimes in an evaluative sense, and sometimes in both senses alternately, as in the phrases 'violent non-violence' (which, it is said, is what happens in Southern Africa) and 'non-violent violence' (which is what terrorist revolutionaries engage in): the nouns describe the reality, and the adjectives evaluate it. The only conclusion we can draw from this is that the real moral appeal is being based not on a judgment about the rights and wrongs of violence itself but on quite different, and probably political, ideas to which the issue of violence is not directly related at all. It may be right that this should be so: but in that case there is no need to use this language. The following passage, taken from a document summarising reactions to the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism, highlights the dangers:

Though [Professor James] Cone admits that the Jesus of history is of some importance for ethical decisions, he emphasises that Jesus' past activity and behaviour are more of a 'pointer to what he is doing now' and a 'sign of God's eschatological future' than an absolute ethical guideline for our attitude today. To hold otherwise would 'remove the element of risk in ethical decisions and make people slaves to principles. But the gospel of Jesus means liberation; and one essential element of that liberation is the existential burden of making decisions about human liberation without being completely sure what Jesus did or would do. This is the risk of faith'.

Similarly, . . . Canon Burgess Carr . . . [says] 'If for no other reason we must give our unequivocal support to the liberation movements, because they have helped the church to rediscover a new and radical appreciation of the Cross. In accepting the violence of the Cross, God in Jesus Christ sanctified violence into a redemptive instrument for bringing into being a fuller human life'.

I would not be misunderstood: I fully agree with what Cone says elsewhere, that a simplistic view of non-violence lays itself open to the charge of supporting the status quo, and that very often social and political systems which do not use outward force are nevertheless repressive to a degree which merits the evaluative, though not the descriptive, title of violence. My point is that neither Cone nor Carr has avoided the danger of putting his conclusions before his argument. Cone, indeed, rejoices in the fact that he does so, since this for him is the essence of the risk of faith. One wonders, in that case, how it is possible to know with such confidence that liberation itself must have this as 'one essential element': is this not in fact admitting the existence of a principle after all? Again, Carr's idea that the cross justifies

violence<sup>13</sup> is a clear example of an attempt to fit Christian-sounding arguments on to conclusions which appear to have been reached on other grounds.<sup>14</sup>

The underlying problem about the method that the WCC has adopted is that it all too often gives the impression that hard thinking is dangerous for a Christian to engage in. I have no doubt that some will see my previous paragraph as yet another Western attempt to prop up the status quo by cunning arguments. Many voices were raised at Nairobi in protest at the supposedly 'cerebral' activities of talking and writing; one ingenious Dutchman successfully advertised his services as an instructor of mime, dancing and so forth, and various side-shows in the main building gave delegates the opportunity to get away from the strain of hard work and absorb the ecumenical ethos in less demanding ways.<sup>15</sup> Now no-one objects—certainly I do not—to facilities for relaxation in a hectic programme. But the thrust of this line of thought was that experiences too deep for words are more important than mere argument and discussion. Obviously there is a sense in which personal relationships matter far more than statements and mere verbal sword-play. But personal relationships alone will not unite the churches or save the world. Canon Paton says in his forthcoming report: 'nor do I believe that "personal encounter" can always take the place of hard work and disciplined thought—at any rate in this vale of tears and soul-making': and Visser 't Hooft, quoting Bonhoeffer's remark that 'men of action must cease to disparage theology', comments, 'An ecumenical movement which is *only* concerned about action loses its identity as a Christ-centred movement and so becomes a tool of the forces which are drawn up against each other in the social and political field'.<sup>16</sup> There is, of course, no Biblical justification for dividing action and words; indeed, the same letter of James with which we began this section forbids it. Standing in the New Testament as one of the most direct heirs of the Wisdom tradition of the Old, James unites understanding and wisdom with right speaking and clear-cut social action. Clear thinking is not just a tool for propping up the capitalist system! As we shall see, such a combination of thought, speech and action is necessary if the ecumenical movement is to avoid muddle and misunderstanding. It is simply no longer the case that Evangelicals are the ones who are afraid of reason and hard thinking:<sup>17</sup> indeed at Nairobi the boot was if anything on the other foot. Even those who disagreed with John Stott were quite happy to acknowledge that his paper on Evangelism was one of the clearest, in thinking and presentation, of the whole Assembly.

To sum up so far: the action-reflection method makes a much-needed point, but often at the expense of an equally needed emphasis on understanding. And that understanding must come logically *before* the action, though it will of course be modified and deepened as the action and subsequent reflection are brought to bear on it. This is

emphatically not a call for delaying action, but for a full obedience which will include the mind as well as the rest of the whole person.

## 2. *Unity—at the cost of Freedom?*

THERE is no need, however, to abandon reflection when the action is over; and I therefore propose to offer some reflections on the two main aspects of the Assembly theme. The ecumenical movement is naturally associated in most people's minds with the work of uniting the churches, but there have been wide differences of opinion as to what, precisely, unity is and how we are to go about seeking it. This applies not only to church structures, but also to wider issues in the ecumenical scene, namely, the questions of ecumenical reporting and ecumenical structures.

It is inevitable, in an Assembly at which over 2,000 people are present, that there will be several widely divergent points of view expressed. Two quite distinct possibilities are thus open to those who write reports and draft statements. Either they can produce a statement which achieves unanimity at the cost of papering over real divisions, or they can acknowledge that unanimity has not yet fully been reached by allowing different points of view to be expressed in an unambiguous way<sup>24</sup>—which, incidentally, allows the points on which there really is agreement to stand out sharply. As the WCC itself pleads for linguistic unity 'not by eliminating minority languages but by encouraging multilingualism',<sup>25</sup> so I would plead for a unity, among those who sign reports, to be achieved not by fudging all the issues so that everyone may imagine that his point has been represented but by clearly stating the different points of view that are in fact held.<sup>26</sup>

Exactly the same problem faces the WCC when it examines its own structures—as it must do from time to time.<sup>27</sup> The following remarks are intended to show areas in which danger lies, not in order to criticise for the sake of criticism but in order that the WCC may do better the job it aims to do. That job involves representing the churches: and, where the churches agree with it, the WCC does this admirably. When disagreement arises, however, there is a ready answer: instead of seeking to understand the position of those who disagree, it is assumed that their disagreement arises not from Christian conviction but from reactionary politics, and they are told: 'We must be prophetic. This involves standing out against backward-looking forces within the church, and going on ahead of them and calling them to new levels of obedience.'<sup>28</sup> No-one would deny that this is often the right answer to give, but there is a real danger here of a heads-I-win-tails-you-lose argument: if we agree with the WCC, then they will represent us, but if we disagree, then they have a duty to expose our obscurantism and call us prophetically to repentance and 'costly ecumenism'.<sup>29</sup> I am all

for 'costly ecumenism'; but if the cost is not to be borne by all parties, the notion has simply become a blunt instrument, useful for finishing the job if an argument misfires.

Many arguments, however, did not get the chance at Nairobi even to misfire, since the whole Assembly was so structured that, try as one might, the 'official line' tended to come out in the end. Only about one-third of those at Nairobi were there as the chosen representatives of their churches: the Church of England delegates, alarmed at this, sent a letter to Dr. Potter towards the end of the Assembly asking that a better balance should be struck in the future. This letter proceeded to spark off counter-criticism,<sup>24</sup> most of which (in my opinion) missed the point entirely. Of course there should be advisers and observers, staff and fraternal delegates: we need them and their skills, official or unofficial. It is not, as one man suggested, a matter of whether a person is officially from the Synod or not (as it happens, some Church of England delegates were appointed by Synod and some—myself included—by the Archbishops); nor is it a question of vetting in advance the people who come with specialist skills. The plain fact is that in the Hearings and Sections, so far as I and others I talked to could see, only about one in three or four of the speakers from platform or floor wore the distinctive red badge of the delegate.<sup>25</sup> Thus where the real work was to be done the real representatives of the churches were not able to do it. The fact that delegates alone had voting rights counted for very little, as I do not remember any votes at all being taken in the Hearings and Sections, and the plenary debates were so hurried, and often chaired in such an unorthodox fashion, that carefully-taken votes on seriously-debated topics were few and far between. It is a curious fact that, the closer one came to the point where real effective decisions had to be made, the harder it was to do anything positive. Thus it was that the work groups were good, but had no means except very indirect ones of making their findings known; the Sections wrote reports (or rather the committees of the Sections wrote reports) but these are not in fact binding on anyone; the Hearings did not produce official reports at all, but merely concluded with general support for the WCC programmes as they were. And yet it is the Hearings that lay down the guidelines for what the WCC is actually to *do* in the coming seven years. When the Hearing involving the Programme to Combat Racism reported to the plenary session, delegates were not allowed to debate the controversial points because, it was said, they would come up under the debate on Section V. So the Hearing, which determines what will actually happen, passed without difficulty, while the debate was shuffled off to a quarter where it could do no damage to the Programme in question.

All of this adds up to one basic question which must be asked: is there not a danger of seeming to achieve a common mind on issues at the expense of the freedom of individuals to say what they really think?



There is a particular irony about this point: the Agenda and Report for Section V both stressed the importance of allowing for dissent within churches and religious communities, and an amendment was accepted which pointed out that this should apply to the WCC itself as well as to everyone else.<sup>36</sup> It is crucial for the future health of the organisation that it lets *all* its members and participants make their voices heard; only so will it be truly a *World Council of Churches*. The danger was highlighted by, for instance, the sudden appearance of one of the WCC Presidents (after the convenient tea-break in the middle of the Helsinki debate) to propose that the question of the USSR's violation of human rights should be sent back to the relevant committee. Finally, lest any should think that I have overdrawn the picture of a staff-dominated Assembly with a 'Geneva line' being laid down, let me quote from Dr. Kenneth Slack, as mild and reasonable an ecumenical figure as anyone could wish. He writes of:

a grave weakness of the World Council. For all the vaunting of the method of dialogue as a way towards truth and understanding there is too little evidence of provision of contrasted viewpoints . . . it is hard to escape the impression that certain lines are being 'plugged' somewhat vehemently, and a good deal of courage is needed at times to question the assumptions on which some of them are based.

This is not to plead for an uncommitted World Council that merely holds the ring for general debate. It is to plead for a less propagandist tone for some of the 'in-put' at assemblies, and a fuller recognition of a greater intellectual complexity than is sometimes apparent. Many would agree with the Bishop of Truro when . . . he pleaded for a technique which did not metaphorically hit people on the head so much.<sup>37</sup>

The World Council must thus set people free to be themselves, and to act accordingly, if its unity is to be more than hollow. This theme came out clearly in the Assembly's work on the nature of church unity, and particularly in the theme of 'conciliar fellowship'.<sup>38</sup> We were treated to two splendid addresses by Fr. Cyrille Argenti and Professor John Deschner, the former giving us rich patristic theology and the latter opening up some stimulating thoughts based on Acts 15. The report of Section II, 'What Unity Requires', was a fine piece of work, and it too was presented, by the Bishop of Oxford, with great skill. The twentieth century concept of 'conciliarity' is still, to be sure, in its infancy; but it seems to me at least that it offers a real hope of a way forward, as an intermediate goal before full unity is possible. We must be free to be ourselves before we can be truly one: as Burgess Carr said in his speech of welcome to the delegates on behalf of the African churches, unless we are first liberated we cannot be united.<sup>39</sup> The pattern of Ephesians 4: 15 sets the right tone: speaking the truth (not a watered-down 'palatable' version of it) in love (neither fearing domination nor arrogantly determining to win at all costs) we are to grow up into Christ (not *down* into a loose-knit, papered-over unity). In the day-to-day life of the Assembly I found this to be profoundly

true; by attempting to speak the truth in love, instead of hiding the light of truth under a bushel of 'tolerance', I found again and again an amazing depth of fellowship with people of widely differing views. As Archbishop Fisher said at New Delhi: 'It is for unity in truth and holiness that we work and pray. . . . A movement which concentrates on unity as an isolated concept can mislead the world and mislead us.'<sup>10</sup>

There is, however, one point here at which more clarity of thought is called for. Uppsala declared that the Unity of the Church is to be a 'Sign of the Coming Unity of Mankind', and Nairobi, pausing only to alter the last word to 'humankind', continued to talk in these terms.<sup>11</sup> But in the enthusiasm for this idea many points are overlooked which are necessary if a false utopianism is to be avoided. I have drawn attention to some of them elsewhere:<sup>12</sup> and, as noted above, Professor Brown in his address pointed out that Jesus continues to divide the believer from the non-believer. This, too, is a basic issue of freedom: God will not, and the WCC should not, impose a hollow unity upon unwilling people in the church or in the world at large.

### 3. *Freedom—at the cost of Justice?*

LIKE Unity, Freedom is by definition a good thing; but there are false freedoms which are decidedly less than the best, since they cut radically across other Christian goals. It is good to see that liberty and licence are frequently and clearly distinguished in WCC thinking, as are the positive and negative aspects of freedom (freedom *for* x and *from* y). But there are, nevertheless, three basic ways in which the concept of freedom is in danger of being obscured within the thought of the WCC as it met in Nairobi. All three concern the interrelation of freedom and structures both in society and in the church.

First, freedom is *not attained by the removal of structures*. To take away structures does not make for freedom, but fragmentation; and in the chaos of a de-structured society it is in fact far easier for manipulation to creep in. Even in the midst of a general attack on structures, the agenda for Section IV notes that 'by providing a framework for sustaining life, [structures] fulfil a positive function in history':<sup>13</sup> but, once one has accepted that, the door is open to a far more positive evaluation of the theology of structures than is usually given in WCC circles. 'Structures of Injustice' are obviously wrong; but why should there not be 'structures of justice'? We must learn to hold in the correct tension the Biblical statement that Christ has conquered the principalities and powers and the equally Biblical statement that the powers that be are ordained by God; and this the WCC seem reluctant to do, with the statement in the report of Section VI that 'We are not faithful to Jesus Christ when we submit to the powers that be: at that

moment we become captives of the powers that have been defeated by Christ'. (It would be nice to see at least an acknowledgment that the question of Romans 13 was being begged!)\* Again, in the life of the Assembly itself there was the false freedom of unstructured material; are participants *really* freer if almost the entire preparatory material is composed of short and disconnected scraps of writing, which in themselves (so we were told) are not 'official' in the sense that they are not setting out to suggest particular lines of thought? Apparently the delegates at Uppsala said they did not like having the reports prepared in advance (though I know of one Uppsala delegate who was surprised to hear that). But for delegates to have something substantial in their hands several months in advance (*Uppsala to Nairobi* and the *Work Book* came too late for detailed pre-Assembly study) means that they are in fact more and not less free to make their views and disagreements known than if a report has to be written from scratch in a matter of three or four already crowded days by five or six already overworked people, and then debated at high speed by an Assembly that only received the typescript seven or eight minutes earlier. It is a wonder that many of the reports are as good as they are. On the positive side, it should be noted that the Assembly's worship struck on the whole an excellent balance of formal and informal, old and new.

If freedom is not attained by the removal of structures, *nor is it attained by attacking selected structures only*. Here we are in another theological and political minefield, where every word and sentence may set off explosions to right and to left. I must again emphasise that I do not wish to grind particular axes, but simply to reflect, from what I hope to be a Christian point of view, on the thought and action of Nairobi. I would like to make six points.

(a) There can be no denying that in past years the WCC has laid itself wide open to the charge of operating one law for the Right and another for the Left—in favour of the latter. One has only to think of the questions of Vietnam and South Africa to remember the endless attacks on right-wing positions without the slightest sign of awareness that South Vietnam might actually have preferred to stay non-communist or that those South Africans committed to the struggle against *apartheid* were not always convinced that the WCC attacks were the best way of furthering their cause. This trend is also visible in the description of 'the end of direct super-power involvement in Indochina' and 'the changed situation in Portugal' as 'signs of hope'.\*\* They can only be 'signs of hope' if we first accept thoroughly left-wing premises about both situations.

(b) Many of the actions of the Nairobi Assembly, and particularly its statements on political matters, are open to the same charge. Thus, the statements on the Middle East, East Timor, Angola and so on all followed a predictably left-wing line, making the WCC look very much like the shadowy replica of the United Nations that some have accused

it of being. In the light of recent developments, in Angola in particular, the naïve optimism of those who thought that the withdrawal of the Portuguese was the prelude to real freedom is tragic indeed. Even more naïve, and even more tragic in view of the developments in Africa since the Assembly, was a letter from a British Methodist delegate to the Assembly newspaper saying that the black terrorists fighting for liberation in Southern Africa do so 'in love and not in hate'.<sup>36</sup> It is true that some wars of liberation have been fought in this spirit. But the known methods of today's terrorists do not allow us to draw the same conclusion.

(c) There was a strong call at the Assembly for an evenhanded approach, which was partly answered and partly rebuffed. Delegates from a wide spectrum of political backgrounds expressed the opinion that justice should be seen to be done across the board, and not in selected areas only. Albert van den Heuvel of the Netherlands, an ex-WCC official himself, spoke of the need to do away with 'zones of silence'. Richard Holloway of Edinburgh, who earlier had described himself as 'no supporter of capitalism', said that it was time that the Russians joined the other rich white imperialist colonialist nations in the public confessional, and that those of us who were already there would gladly move up a bit and let them in. Most of the report of Section V was couched in such terms as to be easily applicable on a worldwide scale. And there was a welcome recognition from Canon Burgess Carr, in a moving impromptu speech, that liberation from white rule had not been an unmixed blessing in Africa, with the vast majority of refugees in that continent coming from 'free' states and with the rise of new, black, forms of oppression and dictatorship. (The play 'Muntu' also showed current African awareness that neither Communism nor Amin-style rule is what is needed for Africa to be free.) With realism such as this, it might be felt, there is genuine hope that increased co-operation between hitherto divided Christians may be possible. But at the same time there was strong pressure from some quarters in the WCC to resist the call for evenhandedness. Philip Potter in his Report went so far as to say:

One often has the impression that the call for 'even-handedness' masks a longing to escape from facing the particular challenges which concern us as churches and nations directly or indirectly in our own situations.

This may well be true in some cases: it is certainly not in a good many, for instance among the South African delegates. Some that I met were at the same time passionately concerned about seeking social justice in their country and heartily sickened at the way in which speaker after speaker poured abuse on them as though they were the only nation in the world to have any problems of human rights.<sup>37</sup>

(d) It is a relief to report that the issue of religious liberty in the USSR was finally brought out into the open, despite attempts by both the Russians themselves and the WCC staff to suppress it.<sup>38</sup> The

eventual debate, held late at night a bare two days before the close of the Assembly, was extremely revealing: two quite distinct Russian attitudes emerged. On the one hand some were adamant that there is no violation of religious liberty in the USSR: one man declared that their churches were full and flourishing, and could teach the West a thing or two about lively Christianity (which may be true: but not—which is what he meant—on account of religious liberty). On the other hand, some admitted that things were difficult, and that being up against an officially atheistic state made for many problems, but claimed that for the WCC to make a fuss about it might not be the best way of solving their problems. This raises the acutely difficult problem of knowing how much one should 'read between the lines': it is possible that the latter group really, but wrongly, believed that it would be better for the WCC to keep quiet, or again that they felt they had to say what they did to protect either themselves or their flocks at home. It should be pointed out that all the evidence so far shows that protests from those outside are in fact greatly beneficial to oppressed minorities in the USSR. Discretion and valour were both prominent: I doubt if I shall ever meet men that I admire more than some of those Russian Christians. In any case, the committee eventually decided to recommend that a study be made of religious liberty in the USSR: and the Assembly added the rider that the first report should be made to the Central Committee at its meeting in August 1976. Is it too optimistic to hope that a new era may begin in which the whole church—and not just those in the Wurmbrand readership bracket—will come to care passionately about the plight of Soviet Christians as well as South African Christians, and of Soviet Jews as well as South African blacks, coloureds and Asians?

(e) A question: is it not dangerous for one group of Christians to tell another group that it must repent of its particular sins when the issue in question is one into which other motives may easily come? In some (though by no means all) of the public breast-beating I hear the voice not of the penitent but of the politician, confessing not his own sins but those of his political opponents. The fact that national repentance may be necessary does not entitle those who are not involved in it themselves to use it as a form of spiritual blackmail. Repentance is too precious a gift to be used as a political tool.<sup>39</sup>

(f) There is an ever-present danger that, when Christians try to speak out prophetically, they gain much of their material not from fresh Christian insights but from the Spirit of the Age—or from one of the Spirits of the Age, since this is not a fault of any one side or party only. Thus we must ask in particular: is it really a specifically Christian insight to adopt a Broad Left standpoint? Or is it simply part of the residual cast of mind which has been the result of the proper sympathy for the workers during the 'twenties and 'thirties and the proper hatred of Hitler's abominations? In which case, might it not

be a little out of date? Perhaps the most absurd thing that came out of Nairobi was the Youth Statement, whose shrill and cliché-ridden denunciations of all that was not Left would have merited the comment, from another recent context, of a leading British Democratic Socialist:

There is a tendency for older members of the party to nod patronisingly and say 'This is just youthful idealism. We were all like that once'. In fact it is neither youthful nor idealistic. It is narrow-minded, bitter, and terribly old-fashioned. Its leading exponents have never got beyond the class-war dogma of the 1920s . . . I get the impression that it is written by some Rip Van Winkle who went to sleep during the General Strike of 1926 and has just woken up. . . .<sup>40</sup>

Similar comments on modern 'leftist-liberal faddishness' come from the bold pen of Andrei Sakharov: excerpts from his recent book *My Country and the World*<sup>41</sup> were published in the *Sunday Times* the day before the Helsinki debate at Nairobi, giving at least one delegate plenty of food for thought. It is time to say clearly that to ignore the writings of such men, or to write them off as wild exaggerations, is no part of the honest Christian's social duty. The 'pale pink' attitude is no longer young and trendy: some of us have lived all our lives with it as the accepted norm, the 'moderate' position in terms of which others are defined as 'right' or 'left'.

Third, freedom is *not attained by the inversion of structures*. In structure A group X are oppressed and group Y are the oppressors. It is therefore the Christian's God-given duty to stand up for the rights of X, often to the extent of denouncing Y and attacking A, the structure which institutionalises the oppression. So far, so good: few Christians will disagree with this. But here there is an incipient danger. In this creditable zeal for the cause of the underdog it is all too easy for the would-be reformer to identify X with justice and Y with injustice, with the result that he in effect supports X right or wrong and denounces Y wrong or right. To invert the relationship in this way, so that slave becomes master and master slave, does not advance the cause of justice one inch. Thus a critic of (let us say) Russia might well reach the stage where, having for some time denounced the authorities and supported the plight of oppressed minorities within the Soviet Union, he then so identified the Kremlin with all things evil that he would be incapable of recognising any genuine move towards freedom and justice that might emanate from it, inevitably regarding it as just a more subtle form of propaganda. Here the result has been that the critic has in his mind a new structure, B, in which X is always right and Y is always wrong; and if he got the opportunity to put it into practice it would be quite as unjust as the previous one, with the added risk of an element of self-righteous blindness creeping in. Now historically some of the great movements in theology have begun with a sharp swing in one direction followed by a consolidating period in which the best of the old is allowed to be reinstated alongside the best of the new

in a firmer and more balanced framework than either possessed on their own. This is essentially a second-generation job; and, as the WCC is now nearly thirty years old, it might well be a timely moment for the task to be undertaken.

Is the WCC really in danger of such an inversion of structures? Not, perhaps, in such absurd ways as I have indicated above. But there are two main areas in which the danger needs to be avoided.

(a) In the area of personal identity, there is at the moment a danger of inverted racism and inverted sexism. The anti-racist can easily be so taken up with attacking one form of racism that he ignores all other forms, or even seeks to promote a new form.<sup>42</sup> As for inverted sexism, it would clearly be foolish of me to comment except by quoting with approval the remark of a fine Kenyan Christian MP, Mrs. Julia Ojiambo, in the Women's Plenary Presentation:

In my own view women are not equal to men just as men are not equal to women, nor is one woman equal to another woman. Each individual is unique and contributes to his society according to his own ability ideally. It is, I think, not unfair to say that this remark was not always typical of Nairobi pronouncements on the subject of women's rights; it does not solve the problem, but sets out a balanced view of the goal in sight which avoids the danger of inverted prejudice.

(b) In the area of personal and national roles as opposed to identity, there is a danger of inverted imperialism and inverted paternalism. The first was pointed out by a Third World speaker, a Brazilian Pentecostal, who said (in the debate following Robert McAfee Brown's paper) that we must oppose imperialism wherever it comes from, and that other world powers besides the United States are guilty of it. There was a classic and ironic example of inverted paternalism in the Hearing on Education, which sought to put across the message that education was no longer something to be practised by the man at the front knowing all the answers and the pupils meekly learning them from him, but was rather to encourage conflict and change by allowing people to be themselves and to learn together, teacher and pupil alike. The Hearing began with a presentation from the officials who were running the group, after which the members were not allowed open discussion but were told to confine their questions to clarifying points made in the presentation. . . .<sup>43</sup>

Freedom, then, is not attained by removing structures, nor by attacking selected structures only, nor yet by inverting structures. True freedom is, in one sense, something St. Paul possessed in prison: it is, as the Archbishop of Canterbury said in his sermon in Nairobi Cathedral, not liberation from temporal shackles only. Like unity, freedom is only attained as we grow up into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: and it is to that costly and difficult task that I wish to turn now, in what I hope will be a positive and open-ended conclusion.

#### 4. *Obedience to Jesus Christ: the Pattern of true Unity and Freedom*

I BEGIN with four propositions.

(a) The true end and object of man is the knowledge of God. This is a category wide enough to include both personal faith and positive action in the world.<sup>44</sup>

(b) Knowledge of God must be Christ-shaped. This is true of saving knowledge of God, of which Christ is the medium, and also of natural knowledge, since Christ is also the agent of creation, and what we see of God in creation thus bears his stamp.

(c) Knowledge of Christ must be knowledge of Jesus. This cuts across many views today, which stress the idea of 'one Jesus, many Christs', finding individual images of Christ to correspond to different backgrounds and situations. Some would virtually *define* Christ as whoever or whatever brings liberation or unity in a given situation.<sup>45</sup> The biblical writers know nothing of this; for them, the gospel consists precisely in bringing together the two names of Jesus and Christ.

(d) Therefore, our knowledge of God in Jesus must be 'according to the Scriptures' as the WCC's own basis of faith professes. As has been well said,

What Jesus are we talking about? Even Paul in his day recognised the possibility of teachers proclaiming 'another Jesus' than the Jesus he preached (2 Cor. 11:4). And there are many Jesuses abroad today. There is Jesus the Bultmannian myth and Jesus the revolutionary firebrand, Jesus the failed superstar and Jesus the circus clown. It is over against these human reinterpretations that we need urgently to recover and reinstate the authentic Jesus, the Jesus of history who is the Jesus of Scripture.<sup>46</sup>

Though the WCC profess to keep to this basis, there is little doubt but that in practice the Bible is used to back up positions already reached on other grounds.<sup>47</sup> It was somewhat surprising to see so little attempt at proper exegesis in the Assembly itself<sup>48</sup> in view of the recent work of the Portfolio for Biblical Studies<sup>49</sup> and in view of the WCC's general emphasis on the human element in theology. I want therefore to take three aspects of the Biblical picture of Jesus Christ, each of which contains a point of doctrinal tension which will, if maintained, illuminate our thinking as we grapple with the theological questions raised at Nairobi.

One of the most basic statements that Christians have made about Jesus Christ, from some of the earliest New Testament writings to the present, is that he is God and became man. The principle of the incarnation thus lies at the heart of all Christian theology: and it is a wonderful thing for the church that in recent years the full humanity of Jesus has been so heavily stressed. There has long been a danger, particularly among Evangelicals, of an incipient docetism, which owes its origin not to the Reformation primarily (no-one could accuse, say, Calvin of ignoring the humanity of Jesus!) but to a later world-denying



Pietism: few will deny that this has issued in a *laissez-faire* attitude to politics and to the social and material needs of humankind. In this context the determination of the WCC to 'earth' its theology in particular situations is greatly to be praised. But at the same time, Christians have asserted that there is an essential mystery about the incarnation: that it is not only true that it was a man that God became, but that it was *God* who became man. Insofar as any theologian chooses to ignore or play down this aspect of mystery, he or she runs the risk of dissolving the essential tension of the truth as much as does the pietist or docetist. This is related to the old question of 'vertical' versus 'horizontal': the balance is so fine that the same person sometimes feels constrained to emphasise a different point of view according to what sort of debate happens to be taking place. It is not unfair, I think, to say that at Nairobi there was a tremendous groundswell of opinion in favour of a re-emphasis on the 'vertical' dimension of Christianity, not at all to the exclusion of the horizontal, nor in order to retreat into cosy pious huddles, but in order to set the horizontal in a properly balanced context. There are still those, however, who feel that we have not yet moved far enough away from docetism and pietism, and that to risk lapsing into them again at this stage would be premature. Obviously the situation varies a good deal according to which part of the Christian world one is familiar with; but, for what it is worth, I believe that in the WCC at least the time has come to aim again at a full-orbed presentation of the Word made flesh, of a faith in action and of actions that are the expression of faith. This tension must be maintained, I believe, particularly in the area of mission and evangelism, not least in the words we use. If all that brings relief to human predicaments is 'salvation', do we not need another word to describe that which comes through faith alone? And, as has been said, it may be doubted whether the WCC really has the will or the resources to mount a 'Programme to Combat Atheism'.<sup>40</sup> But at the same time it must be noted that the Assembly went a good way towards allaying the fears of those who thought that evangelism would be forgotten entirely. John Stott's speech, the report of Section I, and the frequent interventions of those who wished to stress the 'vertical' dimension, all made it possible to see the WCC being brought back to a more balanced course.<sup>41</sup>

There is, however, not only a danger that the WCC will over-emphasise one or other of the vertical and horizontal dimensions; there is the more subtle risk of pretending that they are the same thing, which produces (to my mind) many problems and absurdities. When we discover that the 'secular' world is 'sacred' after all, created by God and being the sphere of his loving and redeeming work, we must not forget that there is still a distinction between the church and the world, between God and man—still more between God and mammon—which must be mentioned if we are to avoid confusion. One sphere

that illustrates this problem is that of worship: it was entirely symptomatic of this train of thought that we should sing frequently a hymn whose every verse ended 'worship and work must be one'. Now of course worship and work must be one in the sense that they must reflect and be fully coherent with each other; any alternative is either dishonesty (if the worship does not reflect the work) or disobedience (if the work does not embody the worship). But that is not to say that when we sing hymns and when we sit down to work we are doing exactly the same sort of thing. If we think we are, the result is likely to be a muddle—neither vertical nor horizontal, as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin says, but diagonal—which is likely to have neither a heavenly mind nor an earthly use.<sup>52</sup> To assert the humanity and divinity of Christ is *not* to assert that humanity and divinity are just the same thing.

The second of the paradoxical aspects of the biblical picture of Jesus Christ is the tension of death and resurrection, of judgment and salvation. This is related to the previous point in that it adds a moral and ethical dimension to the pattern of the incarnation, and that not at a theoretical level only, but, as we would expect, at the level of practical outworking in the events of Good Friday and Easter Day. Now judgment and salvation are both favourite words in the WCC: but there are various ways in which the concepts still need filling in and developing if they are not to be potentially misleading. In the area of judgment, it is good to see that the liberal theology in which all forms of judgment were regarded as unfortunate relics of a barbaric past is receding into the distance. Modern awareness of modern sins has brought a welcome re-emphasis on the doctrine of the wrath of God. But there are points at which this idea of judgment is at present still immature and selective. It is immature in that it leans very heavily on the Old Testament, without allowing the revelation of God's wrath there to be filled out with the picture of the Messiah who wept over Jerusalem while declaring its condemnation.<sup>53</sup> It is selective in that it fails to acknowledge a proper theology of the fall, and thus condemns sin only where it happens to notice it (especially in the political arena) without recognising equally the presence of sin in, for instance, the refusal of adherents of 'other faiths and ideologies' to submit to Christ,<sup>54</sup> and without being prepared to see elements of sin in particular stances and ideals which might commend themselves on other grounds. The absence of a proper doctrine of the fall is at the root, too, of misleading ideas about salvation, of which incipient universalism is still the most serious.<sup>55</sup> It is still true that it leads in practice to an underemphasis on evangelism and an overemphasis on politics and social action. Again, salvation itself is seen all too often only in Old Testament categories, which results in a failure to appreciate that the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises transcends the categories in which those promises were given.<sup>56</sup>

It seems to me that the model of judgment and salvation set before us in the life of Jesus is at once more complex and more simple. In the gospel for Advent Sunday,<sup>57</sup> which fell appropriately in the middle of the Assembly, Jesus appears as both the humble King and the angry King. If salvation is to be seen in strictly political terms, then why did Jesus come on a donkey (to a city that cried out for political liberation) instead of at the head of a revolutionary force (which many had hoped that he would do)? Jesus had come, as the previous chapter of Matthew makes clear,<sup>58</sup> because of a more pressing and basic problem: humility and, literally, self-sacrifice were the means by which he was to solve it. But when Jesus reached the temple, he came as the angry King: the picture of Jesus the humble cannot be used, as so many have used it, as an excuse for ignoring social action. In condemning the traders in the temple, Jesus becomes the instrument of God's judgment not only on the world and its callous commercial exploitation, using outward religion as a pretext for greed, but also on the church and on its involvement with sin of this kind. To put these twin pictures of Jesus together is to see the model for the church's denunciations of human sin in all its forms. All too often there lies behind a denunciation not justice and mercy but jealousy and malice, sometimes motivated by human pride which resents the success of another and sometimes spurred on by human envy which seeks to grab for itself what someone else has got. Jesus' denunciation came not on a human level (not even primarily an altruistic one) but because the house of God was being dishonoured—just as God's dishonour is the real reason why the church must object to all that 'dehumanises' people. Jesus' anger is entirely different from the anger that flows from a hard heart, that not only hates the sin but hates the sinner too (Jesus' coming to Jerusalem was precisely to die for the sinner), and that not only protests against injustice but also rubs its hands with glee at the thought of inflicting defeat on its enemies. It is thus only as we are seeking the glory of God and the salvation of men and women that we have the right, as well as the duty, to protest against the many forms of human sin. All other roads lead to self-righteousness and dangerously mixed motives: to use the gospel as a cloak for jealousy is just as un-Christian as it is to use it as a cloak for exploitation. We all need the warning, issued by James within a few sentences of his scathing denunciations of social discrimination, economic exploitation and 'faith without works', that 'the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God'.<sup>59</sup>

The third and final aspect of the work of Jesus Christ which illustrates a major theological tension is the ascension, the sending of the Spirit, and the promise of the second coming. This leaves the church as the eschatological community, already a colony of heaven and yet called to walk by faith in the world, already indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and yet longing for the time when this mortal will put on immortality, already in Christ, sharing his death and life and his body and blood,

and yet longing to see him face to face. Thus the Christian is called neither to rule the world (as though it were the only sphere of redemption, and as though there were no second coming) nor to renounce it (as though it were not still God's world). Instead, the summons is to *redeem* the world, recognising that fulness of redemption will not be achieved in this age. It is thus possible to avoid a crude utopianism (which is really just another form of theological perfectionism) while still affirming the necessity for action in the world; and it is to the credit of Nairobi that it struck this balance more happily than some previous gatherings have done.<sup>60</sup> As a result, there is real hope that the eschatological themes, of the suffering which leads to glory and of a pilgrim church living as 'strangers and exiles' in the world, will combine with those of being the salt and light of the world to give a thoroughly Biblical balance to future WCC statements of hope.

This issue is raised in particular by Section VI, and by the papers of Charles Birch, Kosuke Koyama and Metropolitan Paul Gregorios that went with it, on the theme of creation, technology and human survival. This area of thought is theologically rich and complex, and I do not pretend any expertise in it: but the following comments may be in order. First, there is a welcome emphasis on the effect of the sin of man upon creation, and a recognition that more and better technology is not necessarily the answer. Second, it is good to see a WCC speaker stressing that 'higher things' cannot be left 'until the stomach is full and the house is warm'.<sup>61</sup> Third, however, there is a continual danger that this healthy scepticism about technology is used as a stalking-horse for merely political attacks on western civilisation in general: and fourth, there is often a too-ready acceptance of creation as good and man as bad, without either the recognition that the creation's fallen condition is itself a serious theological consideration or the acknowledgment that, if all human solutions to the problem are suspect, then the solution of the ecological pressure group represented by Professor Birch *et al* themselves is also to be treated warily. I suspect that again we are up against a limited notion of the fall: where it is acknowledged it is applied too rigidly and leads towards a dualistic rejection of all man's technological efforts, and where it is not acknowledged it can lead to a naïve optimism about both the creation and the Christian responsibility for it to creep in. But, all in all, there is room here for hope of much constructive and practical theology to come.

The three areas of christology to which I have drawn attention point together, in my view, to one major theological question which needs tackling thoroughly and soon. This is the theology of what is sometimes called 'common grace'. I use this phrase to refer to the benefit which comes to man through being created in the image of God, whether or not he is re-created in Christ; to the benefit which comes to the world by the death and resurrection of Christ, whether or not it turns to him for salvation, and to the nations and communities of the

world to whatever extent they allow God's way of life to mould them—to those benefits, in fact, whose existence is entailed by the rejection of dualism and limited by the rejection of universalism or utopianism. Some theologians have simply cut this area out of their thinking by means of a false resolution of one of the tensions mentioned above,<sup>63</sup> or by failing fully to erase either dualism or utopianism from their thinking; but many still see the need to think of this category as a special one demanding special insight. It is crucial, for instance, in the 'other faiths' issue, and in the 'worldwide community' issue which is of course closely related to it;<sup>64</sup> and it is at the heart of a much-needed theology of both state and politics.<sup>65</sup> This is acknowledged by M. M. Thomas when he speaks of 'the very institutions which are meant to protect human beings in society'.<sup>66</sup> I do not believe the question is solved simply by speaking of the church and the state as the 'soul' and 'body' of the one human community, despite Michael Manley's support for this venerable idea in his address (citing Gutierrez). It seems to me that there is an area in which we can and must speak of the relation of God to all societies and individuals without either limiting it to judgment or extending it to the full meaning of salvation. Without such a 'middle ground' we either abandon all social action to the non-Christian or slide all matters of politics, education, social and family life into the ultimate issues of salvation, which may in fact hinder rather than help our attempt to understand them. This is not the place to explore this area further; but it is for me the most crucial theological issue to be raised by Nairobi, coming as it does, in M. M. Thomas' phrase, 'at the cutting edge between the Word and the world'.

### *5. Conclusion*

THE action of Nairobi is past, and the time for reflection has come. Some Christians, stressing that 'he that is not with me is against me', have held aloof from the WCC: others, taking as their motto 'he that is not against you is for you', have shunned narrowly exclusive positions and joined in without necessarily approving if all that the WCC says or does. It is the task of every Christian to decide how this Biblical balance is to be applied in particular situations:<sup>67</sup> and in this light I have tried to be as positive as possible, while necessarily drawing out certain features which seem to me to need correction if the WCC is to achieve its true goals in the best possible way. I believe, as I said at the outset, that God still has great work for the WCC to do: and it is therefore the task of all Christian people to pray for the staff and Central Committee, that they may reflect wisely and act justly in the days to come. There is every reason to hope that Jesus Christ will continue to free us and unite us, as by the power of the Spirit we seek to obey the call of God in the world of today.

- <sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to various friends who have given time and energy to help me think through the issues involved since Nairobi.
- <sup>2</sup> Notably by Kenneth Slack, *Nairobi Narrative* (SCM) and Canon David Paton, *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975* (SPCK), both of which are to be published shortly. I am greatly indebted to both of these writers for allowing me to see their work before publication. Canon Paton's book is the official report, and will include the texts of Section Reports etc., as well as a day-by-day narrative: Dr. Slack's shorter work is a vivid personal account. The British Council of Churches is also producing material to help groups wishing to study the Assembly's findings. See too Bishop S. C. Neill, *Salvation Tomorrow*, to be published by Lutterworth in July.
- <sup>3</sup> English edition, edited by David E. Johnson; London and New York, 1975 (hereafter *UTN*). Like many composite ecumenical works, it lacks any real sparkle and is hardly compelling reading. But it is a full account of most aspects of the WCC's work over the last seven years, including charts of new member churches etc., a long section on finance, and a lexicon of standard abbreviations (highly necessary) and ecumenical jargon (mostly very ugly).
- <sup>4</sup> Geneva, 1975: hereafter *WB*.
- <sup>5</sup> The addresses of the Moderator and General Secretary are to be printed in Canon Paton's Report: the others are to be printed in *Ecumenical Review* and *International Review of Missions*. For all this material I am dependent on the typescripts handed out at the Assembly itself, and will not therefore refer to page numbers.
- <sup>6</sup> *UTN*, p. 88.
- <sup>7</sup> In my article 'Universalism and the World-Wide Community' in *The Churchman* vol. 89 no. 3, July-September, 1975, pp. 197ff (hereafter *UWWC*): cf. p. 205f.
- <sup>8</sup> Though obedience, of course, remains essential for full understanding; cf. John 7: 17.
- <sup>9</sup> To 'leap before you look' may sound a fine 'riskful' (a praise-word in WCC circles) thing to do; but it does not correspond to anything specifically Christian, since it is in looking to God that the Christian has the ground for all that he does by faith and not by human sight. This is yet another product of the idea that faith has a value in itself irrespective of its object.
- <sup>10</sup> *WB*, p. 33f.
- <sup>11</sup> The introduction of new jargon-words speeds up this process in an almost Orwellian way: cf. the definitions of 'conscientisation' and 'privatistic' in *UTN*, pp. 244f., 248.
- <sup>12</sup> Below, para. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> Which is, of course, absurd. The cross shows (*inter alia*) that God takes the worst that men can do and triumphs over it (Acts 2: 23, etc.): if Carr's argument were to mean anything, it ought to mean that innocent people should readily *undergo* suffering, not inflict it, for God to work his transforming purpose (cf. *UWWC*, p. 209f.). It should be noted, however, that arguments not unlike Carr's have been used by Christians for centuries to justify violence when it was thought necessary on other grounds.
- <sup>14</sup> I am well aware that this leaves the whole question of violence unanswered. For the latest WCC attitudes, cf. *UTN*, pp. 116ff.: *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism* (WCC, Geneva, 1975), p. 13: and see the remarks of Bishop Stephen Neill, both in *The Churchman*, vol. 87 no. 4, Winter 1973, pp. 266f., and in his forthcoming book (cf. n. 2 above).
- <sup>15</sup> Notable among these was the 'wall newspaper', a large blank sheet of paper on which all and sundry were free to write slogans, draw cartoons, etc., most of which turned out to be surprisingly similar. My only contribution (borrowed from two other contexts) was OIKOUMENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN.
- <sup>16</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Has the Ecumenical Movement a Future?*, Belfast, 1974, pp. 96f.
- <sup>17</sup> Which is not to say, of course, that there is not a long way to go. But in the light of some recent statements (e.g. Bruce Kaye, 'Theology Comes Tomorrow', in *The Churchman*, vol. 88 no. 4, October-December 1974, pp. 277-287) the point should be weighed.
- <sup>18</sup> i.e., not by letting them stand in the report as though they were consistent—which produces headaches later on—but by saying 'At this point some felt . . . while others thought that . . . and a third group wanted to stress that . . .' etc.

<sup>19</sup> *UTN*, p. 221.

<sup>20</sup> At Nairobi both methods were used: the report of Hearing II, on Faith and Witness, is a good example of what to avoid, and the report of Section III is a good acknowledgment of a variety of views.

<sup>21</sup> It is alarming to find in *UTN*, p. 41, the statement that 'there is no "right" structure and no such thing as a theology of structure. Any decisions about a new structure of the WCC must therefore be pragmatic ones.' It is also odd, in view of the frequent remarks made by the WCC about other structures in the world.

<sup>22</sup> Cf., e.g., *UTN*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>23</sup> A variation of Bonhoeffer's 'costly grace' etc.; cf. *UTN*, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, four letters in the *Church Times* of 2-1-76.

<sup>25</sup> This point is supported by Miss Christian Howard, who writes (*Church Times*, 2-1-76) 'a greater priority in speaking should have been accorded to delegates'. The two subsequent letters on the subject, from Sir Kenneth Grubb (*ibid.*, 9-1-76) and Preb. Henry Cooper (*ibid.*, 23-1-76) are likewise in wholehearted agreement with the point I am making.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *WB*, p. 55. At Uppsala too WCC pronouncements were applied ruthlessly to the WCC itself: cf. *UTN*, p. 197f.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Slack, Nairobi Narrative, p. 54f. This is not, of course, to say that the staff is monochrome, nor that everything that they wanted to happen did happen.

<sup>28</sup> For this term, its background and meaning, cf. *WB*, p. 24, and the General Synod reports GS 268, *Looking Forward to Nairobi*, p. 9, and GS 285, *Jesus Christ Frees And Unites*, p. 6f.

<sup>29</sup> This unity-in-freedom is perfectly illustrated by the saying of the Lord's Prayer all together in our mother tongues—many languages, one meaning. I was, however, a little taken aback to hear a fellow Anglican beginning 'Pater Noster . . .'

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *Evangelicals and Unity*, Appleford, 1964, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *UTN*, pp. 13, 33ff.; *WB*, p. 79f.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. UWWC, *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> *WB*, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. too the extraordinary statement by Professor Charles Birch that 'it is a cop-out for [the churches] to draw a distinction between the things that belong to Caesar and those that belong to God. Nothing belongs to Caesar, except Caesar's evil machinations'. This simply confuses the entire issue. Nor can I understand the objection of Bruce Kaye, *op. cit.* (cf. n. 17 above), p. 286, that para. 13 of the Lausanne Covenant is 'marred by the quite unbiblical statement that "it is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the Church may obey God, serve the Lord Christ, and preach the gospel without interference"'. As John Stott's Commentary makes clear (*The Lausanne Covenant, An Exposition and Commentary*, Minneapolis, 1975, p. 54), the entire section is built around 1 Timothy 2: 1-4. For the theology of 'common grace' underlying these comments, see para. 4 below.

<sup>35</sup> *UTN*, p. 16 (Potter's Introduction).

<sup>36</sup> *Target*, November 28th, 1975.

<sup>37</sup> *Uppsala to Nairobi* is equally unconvincing on the subject: cf. pp. 137ff. Contrast M. M. Thomas, quoting Jan Lochman to the effect that the only 'humanism' that can remain universal and unconditioned is the humanism of the gospel itself.

<sup>38</sup> Why was the Assembly not allowed to debate it earlier than the Monday of the last week, and then only because of an amendment from the floor? And why was the Assembly not told of a telegram sent to the WCC by a group in London pleading for a clear statement about the persecution of Christians and others behind the Iron Curtain?

<sup>39</sup> In the present context it is worth weighing every word of C. S. Lewis' brilliant short essay 'Dangers of National Repentance' in *Undeceptions*, London 1971, pp. 151-153.

<sup>40</sup> Mr. Reg Prentice, in a speech in Oxford on February 7th this year, referring to the Young Socialists and their magazine *Left*. It should be pointed out that the Youth Statement was not an official Assembly document.

<sup>41</sup> A. D. Sakharov, *My Country and the World*, London 1975. Cf. esp. pp. 85-98.

- <sup>43</sup> Cf. *UTN*, p. 154, and several Assembly speeches etc. Kenneth Slack, *op. cit.* (n. 2 above), p. 9 has some perceptive comments to make on this point.
- <sup>44</sup> At which point occurred the much-publicised and fully-justified walk-out, led by the Bishop of Truro and others.
- <sup>45</sup> For this and the next point, cf. UWWC, p. 209f.
- <sup>46</sup> With the assumption that we can always recognise true liberation and unity when we see it: which I have challenged elsewhere. This danger is not always avoided in *WB*, pp. 16-19.
- <sup>47</sup> J. R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, London 1975. The whole book is essential reading on current theological issues facing the WCC.
- <sup>48</sup> See the comments of S. C. Neill, *The Churchman*, vol. 87 no. 4, Winter 1973, p. 272 and esp. p. 273.
- <sup>49</sup> Examples could be multiplied. The presentation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son was a particularly bad instance, despite the music of Donald Swann and the skilful introduction by the Archbishop of Canterbury. A frequent point that needs comment is the readiness to identify Judaisers in the NT with conservatives in today's church, with the easy corollary that today's radicals must represent true Christian thinking! Paradoxically, passages about breaking down walls between Jews and Gentiles are often used, with equal lack of exegetical insight, to support the idea of breaking down walls between those of different religions, Christianity included.
- <sup>50</sup> For a description of present WCC work on the Bible, cf. *UTN*, pp. 52ff.: R. C. Rowe, *Bible Study in the World Council of Churches*, Geneva 1969; H.-R. Weber, in *Ecumenical Review* 23, 1971, pp. 335ff.; E. Flessman-van Leer, in *Study Encounter* 8, 2, 1972; R. T. Beckwith, in *The Churchman*, vol. 89 no. 3, 1975, pp. 213ff. I am also indebted to M. Sadgrove for an unpublished paper on the subject.
- <sup>51</sup> Canon David Edwards, quoted by Slack, *Nairobi Narrative*, p. 9.
- <sup>52</sup> For the whole subject of mission and evangelism, cf. Stott, *op. cit.*
- <sup>53</sup> Leslie Newbigin, in a report added to GS 285, p. 18. The best example is the type of hymn which simply sets ecumenical jargon to music. As Canon Paton says 'some felt . . . that the hymns chosen lacked that specific quality in which the classical hymns are strong and modern productions often weak—that of heartfelt and uninhibited adoration of the Triune God'. Some felt that the Assembly Statement suffered in the same way.
- <sup>54</sup> The over-emphasis on the Old Testament, seen too in the remarks below, is perhaps at the root also of the dangers outlined in para. 1 above; putting knowledge of God's laws before knowledge of God is precisely the trap that waits for man in the OT. Cf. Rom. 9: 30ff.
- <sup>55</sup> Indeed, every excuse is made for them: Robert McAfee Brown spoke of the non-believer as 'the one for whom belief in God has become difficult if not impossible in "a world come of age"'. Against this it must be said that saving belief in God is no harder and no easier in any age: belief of a sort may be encouraged by the Spirit of one age and discouraged by the Spirit of the next, but it is largely irrelevant to questions of eternal salvation. Indeed, it might be misleading, since cheap popular 'religious belief' may easily be mistaken for real Christian faith. On the 'other faiths' issue see my remarks in UWWC, pp. 206ff. The debate on the subject in Section III never really got going, partly because of sheer wasted time and partly because of the polarisation between the advocates of dialogue and those who wanted to assert the uniqueness of Christ. That this polarisation was, and is, quite unnecessary is shown by, e.g., S. C. Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, London 1970 (2nd edition), and Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-81. Cf. *UTN*, pp. 98ff.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. UWWC, pp. 198-206, and Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Evangel Publishing House, Kisumu, Kenya, 1975, esp. pp. 11ff., 85ff. Both sides of the debate were well represented at Nairobi.
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 18f.
- <sup>58</sup> Matt. 21: 1-13.
- <sup>59</sup> Matt. 20: 25-28.
- <sup>60</sup> Jas. 1: 20.
- <sup>61</sup> Cf. Slack, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- <sup>62</sup> Metropolitan Gregorios in his paper.
- <sup>63</sup> Cf. Birch, cited in n. 34 above.



- <sup>63</sup> Cf. UWWC, pp. 206-210. How much clearer might Section III have been if this issue had been more fully acknowledged: Cf. *WB*, pp. 32ff.
- <sup>64</sup> Which needs to take full account of, *inter alia*, Romans 13 and Matthew 5: 43ff.
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. too para. 3, and n. 39, above.
- <sup>66</sup> Cf. Matt. 12: 30 (and Luke 11: 23) with Mark 9: 40 (and Luke 9: 50).