

## COME, HOLY SPIRIT, RENEW THE WHOLE CREATION: SEVENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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**T**HE SEVENTH Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, February 7–20, 1991, has come and gone. Theologians and ecumenists will assess its contribution to ecumenical theology and to the ecumenical movement by analysing its published final reports. However the reports alone cannot do justice to the assembly itself or to the debate it generated. Only by reading them in terms of the issues which emerged prior to and during the assembly can one arrive at an accurate assessment of the reports and, more importantly, the real contribution of the assembly to the ecumenical movement. In the pre-assembly period a series of meetings took place which surfaced many of the major issues which it would have to address. These meetings offer themselves as fruitful headings under which one can analyse the discussions, debates, and documents of the assembly.

### THE ASSEMBLY THEME: BEFORE CANBERRA

This was the first time that the World Council of Churches (WCC) had chosen a pneumatological theme for an assembly.<sup>1</sup> The story of its emergence is a good case study of the workings of the World Council. In this instance one does not discover a refined, inclusive process of discernment as much as a key person with an inspiration and a prevailing interest within the WCC. The key person was Emilio Castro, the General Secretary. In his report to the Central Committee in Geneva, 1987, he began to “wonder” whether the 1991 assembly might not take on a pneumatological theme.<sup>2</sup> From then on there was no real doubt that the theme would be pneumatological, so well did such a focus seem to address the needs of the WCC at that point of history. In analysing why such a focus should appear so appropriate, we discover something about the history and membership of the WCC itself. Emilio Castro outlined some

<sup>1</sup> Though the Uppsala Assembly (1968) did not have an explicitly pneumatological theme, it did produce a report from a very significant pneumatological study, “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church,” in *Uppsala Speaks; Section Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches Uppsala 1968* (Geneva: WCC, 1968) 7–20.

<sup>2</sup> Emilio Castro, “Report of the General Secretary,” *Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987) 245.

of the advantages of the theme in a later discussion. It would involve a trinitarian emphasis. It would be in tune with the pentecostal movements of today. It would oblige the churches to come to terms with what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world.<sup>3</sup> Avery Post, the Moderator of the Assembly Planning Committee, added in the following year that it could contribute to an understanding of the relationship between spirituality and justice.<sup>4</sup>

### *Orthodox Theological Perspective*

Castro's comment that the pneumatological focus would give the theme a trinitarian emphasis speaks, among other things, to the continuing interaction within the WCC between its Western and Eastern members. The Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches are numerically large and have been represented in the membership of the WCC from the beginning, and more fully since the New Delhi Assembly in 1961. They have increasingly found their voice and have become more influential in shaping the direction of the WCC and the content of its reports and statements. This development has been slow and sometimes painful.<sup>5</sup> They have consistently called for genuinely trinitarian theology and have been critical of what they perceived as Christomonist tendencies in ecumenical theology up until the present.<sup>6</sup> Castro and many others were hopeful that the Canberra theme would take the WCC a step further toward satisfying this concern of the Eastern Churches which, partly due to their efforts, is now the concern of many Western participants as well. The Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches held a special consultation on the Canberra theme and subthemes in Crete, November 25 to December 4, 1989. Though they also played their part in the normal working out of the theme, the Crete consultation and the report it produced provide an insight into the specific Orthodox perspective on the Canberra theme. This perspective became one of the major issues at the assembly and consequently supplies one very important heading for any analysis of the assembly and its final reports.

<sup>3</sup> Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, *Minutes of the Thirty-Eighth Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-24 January 1987* (Geneva: WCC, 1987) 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches 7-12 March 1988, Istanbul, Turkey* (WCC Archives, Geneva) 11.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Nikos A. Nissiotis, "The Eastern Orthodox in the Ecumenical Movement," *Mid-Stream* 16 (1977) 183-97; Thomas Hopko, "Uppsala 1968," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 12 (1968) 125-41; "Faith and Order in Ghana," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 18 (1974) 218-23; Todor Sabev ed., *The Sophia Consultation: Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> "Orthodox Reflections on the Assembly Theme," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (1990) 301-302.

*Pentecostal Churches*

Castro's hope that the theme might also build a link with Pentecostal Churches speaks to the fact that there are almost no Pentecostal Church members of the WCC despite their great numbers.<sup>7</sup> It also speaks to the continuing question that the charismatic renewal raises for member churches and for the WCC itself.<sup>8</sup> At the assembly there were some Pentecostal observers, and the Free Pentecostal Mission Church of Chile was received into full membership. The report of the Third Section "Spirit of Unity – Reconcile Your People!" contained a quite positive assessment of the charismatic movement and especially of Pentecostal Churches. It also produced a number of recommendations which could lead to an enhanced engagement of the WCC with Pentecostal Churches. However this issue did not emerge as a major agenda item in Canberra.

Castro's final hope that the Canberra Assembly would oblige the churches to come to terms with what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world addresses a more controversial area of WCC work, as does Avery Post's hope that Canberra might foster the relationship between spirituality and justice. Both drew attention to the analysis undertaken in the WCC of social and political questions confronting Christians in the contemporary world and its often prophetic stance in response to them. Heinz-Joachim Held, Moderator of the Central Committee, acknowledged the difficulties and the challenge that the extensive role attributed to the Holy Spirit presented for many. In his address to the Central Committee meeting in Geneva, March 25–30, 1990, he confessed that the notion of encountering the Spirit in the whole of creaturely reality and not just in the conversion of the individual or the emergence and preservation of the Church was something quite unfamiliar to the theological world in which he had been educated. He saw a further challenge presented to more traditional theology, and not only Protestant theology, by the question of the Holy Spirit's activity in the world of history and in the world of other faiths.<sup>9</sup> A tension exists within the WCC and between it and some of its member churches over the extent to which it should be concerned with social and political questions rather than exclusively with the reunion of the churches. This tension has been there from the beginning. It is well illustrated by two meetings which preceded

<sup>7</sup> See Henry I. Lederle, "The Spirit of Unity: A Discomforting Comforter. Some Reflections on the Holy Spirit, Ecumenism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (1990) 279–87.

<sup>8</sup> See Arnold Bittlinger, ed., *The Church is Charismatic: The World Council of Churches and the Charismatic Renewal* (Geneva: WCC, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Heinz-Joachim Held, "Report of the Moderator," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (1990) 336.

the assembly, each representing one of these fundamental priorities of the vast WCC program, and each significant for the assembly itself.

### *Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*

The first of these was the World Convocation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) held in Seoul, Korea, in March 1990. It tackled in a very forthright way a whole range of controversial social and political issues which confront the Christian churches in the world today. Its special significance for Canberra was that it gave a specific shape to the WCC approach to questions of justice and peace. It also devoted considerable attention to "the integrity of creation" and hence brought to center stage reflection on environmental issues. This convocation was the backdrop for discussion of the assembly theme, and to it should probably be attributed the choice and easy acceptance of the second half of the statement of the assembly theme, "renew the whole creation." "Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation" (JPIC) is not just one of the fundamental priorities in the WCC program. It was also the prevailing interest or focus that more than any other shaped the preparations for the Canberra Assembly and the assembly itself. Therefore JPIC offers another very appropriate heading for an analysis of the assembly and its final reports.

### *Commission on Faith and Order*

The other meeting of significance for Canberra was the meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order (FOC) in Budapest, August 9–12, 1989. There it was decided to produce a revised version of the study text, *Confessing One Faith*,<sup>10</sup> which was the first published draft from its program entitled "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today." It was to be published shortly after the Canberra Assembly. The Commission on Faith and Order represents to many the clearest example of the other pole of WCC concern, the restoration of unity between the churches through the resolution of divisive issues of faith and order. In attempting to produce an ecumenical explication of the apostolic faith based on the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 the FOC had to deal in turn with creation and with the Holy Spirit. It also produced a specific response to the Canberra theme. Consequently, parallel to and intersecting occasionally with the pre-assembly reflection on the theme, there was another very serious attempt within the WCC to explore the theological foundations of the Canberra theme. Moreover,

<sup>10</sup> World Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Order, *Confessing One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)* (Faith and Order Paper 140; Geneva: WCC, 1987).

between Budapest and Canberra the FOC worked on the draft of a new description of the goal of the ecumenical movement, "The Unity We Seek," for presentation to the assembly. The FOC offers a third very important heading under which one can analyse the assembly and its final reports.

*Dialogue with People of Living Faiths*

Castro's hope concerning the churches coming to terms with the work of the Holy Spirit in the world also encompasses what proved to be one of the most controversial issues in Canberra, the role of the Holy Spirit in other world religions. This issue needs to be linked to the work of another department of the WCC, the Sub-Unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. This subunit produced a document entitled "Theological Perspectives on Plurality" after a consultation in Baar, Switzerland, in January 1990. Therein it found itself able to affirm "unequivocally that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of living faiths."<sup>11</sup> The consultation hoped that their statement would assist discussion in Canberra. Wesley S. Ariarajah, the Director of the Sub-Unit for Dialogue, was also the Staff Coordinator of the Assembly Planning Committee for Canberra. He organized a Pre-Assembly Multi-Faith Dialogue in Hong Kong, August 12-14, 1990. Those from other religious traditions at this gathering would largely be attending the Canberra Assembly as guests. With their Christian dialogue partners they produced a message to the participants in the upcoming assembly. This latter meeting had provoked some reaction in Geneva because of a fear of syncretism, or of obscuring the uniqueness of Christianity and the unique role of the Holy Spirit within the Church.<sup>12</sup> These concerns of the Dialogue Sub-Unit provide a final overarching heading for analyzing the real issues dealt with in Canberra.

While the inspiration for the pneumatological emphasis of the theme came from Emilio Castro, its fuller statement was worked out by the Assembly Planning Committee. Originally it had proposed "Come, Holy Spirit - Renew the Face of the Earth" but, after discussion at a Central Committee meeting in August 1988, it was changed to "Come, Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation" to make clear that its focus was as broad as possible and not simply ecological.<sup>13</sup> The subthemes proposed at that

<sup>11</sup> "Baar Statement," *Current Dialogue* 18 (1990) 6.

<sup>12</sup> "Proposal on Interfaith Dialogue Prompts Debate in W.C.C. Committee," *Ecumenical Press Service* 88.08.78; "Vive réaction orthodoxe," *La Vie oecuménique. Chronique du COE* 10 (1990) 2.

<sup>13</sup> Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, *Minutes of the Thirty-Ninth Meeting, Hanover, Federal Republic of Germany, 10-20 August, 1988* (Geneva: WCC, 1989) 18-20.

same meeting and which remained unchanged from that point were as follows: Giver of Life – Sustain Your Creation; Spirit of Truth – Set us Free; Spirit of Unity – Reconcile Your People; Holy Spirit – Transform and Sanctify Us. As resources for Canberra, the Assembly Planning Committee produced a considerable number of books and other publications. From a theological perspective the most important were the actual book of resources for discussion, *Resources for Sections: The Theme, Subthemes, and Issues*,<sup>14</sup> and a companion book of theological articles, *To the Wind of God's Spirit*.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Resources for Sections*

The book of resources for the assembly firstly explored the overarching theme, "Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation." In describing the work of the Holy Spirit, it traced a link between three biblical quotations, beginning with Gen 1:2. Its starting point, therefore, was the Spirit of God moving over the waters in the first creation story, the Spirit as the giver of life. Next it turned to the promise of Joel 2:28 that God would pour out the Spirit "on all flesh," the promise of universal rebirth. Finally, it turned to Acts 2:16, describing Pentecost as the fulfilment of this promise. This event gave birth to the Christian community, the Church, empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to the One who creates, renews, and empowers life in community.<sup>16</sup> The opening paragraphs were not entirely pneumatological, though they were heavily so. As the introduction unfolded, a more trinitarian perspective emerged; but it was not emphasised. The focus was on the Holy Spirit. However, the Spirit's gifts of faith and life were described in various ways as relating us to the Father and to Jesus Christ. The Spirit's work of renewing creation was seen as bringing to fulfilment God's original purpose unfulfilled because of human sin; and the truth into which the Spirit guides us was described as manifest in Jesus Christ. The Spirit's relationship to the Church was very clearly stated but so was the activity of the Spirit "in all places

<sup>14</sup> *Resources for Sections: The Theme, Subthemes and Issues*. World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly 1991 (Geneva: WCC, 1990). See also Krister Stendahl, *Energy for Life. Reflections on the Theme "Come, Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation"* (Geneva: WCC, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Emilio Castro, ed., *To the Wind of God's Spirit: Reflections on the Canberra Theme* (Geneva: WCC, 1990). These articles were a selection taken from three issues of *Ecumenical Review* on the Canberra theme and subthemes: *ER* 41 (July 1989); 42 (April 1990); 42 (July–Oct. 1990). In addition, four issues of the WCC's *International Review of Mission* devoted some space to the subthemes of the Assembly: *IRM* 79 (April 90); 79 (July 1990); 79 (Oct. 1990); 80 (Jan. 1991). In his editorials in *IRM* Christopher Duraisingh drew parallels between the Canberra subthemes and the sectional themes of the WCC World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, San Antonio, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> *Resources for Sections* 1.

and among all people."<sup>17</sup>

The account of each subtheme contained both a biblical-theological introduction and a description of the issues which were seen to arise from this theology. The fundamental argument of the theological description of the first subtheme, "Giver of Life – Sustain Your Creation," was that the Spirit is present in creation as the source of all its life. The Spirit is also present in the renewed life revealed in the life and resurrection of Jesus and at Pentecost. Creation is intrinsically good because it comes from the Triune God. Human sin has brought death and destruction into it, but in the resurrection of Christ the Spirit has renewed all things. The working out of the Spirit's renewing activity was described above all in the terms of the Spirit overcoming dualisms which even found a place in Christian theology, e.g. material vs. spiritual, mind vs. body, humanity vs. nature. The theological argument was simply that these are founded on a mistaken division between the Creator Spirit and the created world.<sup>18</sup> Many of the emphases of the Orthodox consultation found a place in this account, but there seems to have been a misunderstanding in the equation of the Holy Spirit with "the uncreated energy of God."<sup>19</sup>

The account of the second subtheme, "Spirit of Truth – Set Us Free," focussed on the freedom the Spirit brings rather than on the Spirit as Spirit of Truth. While it was acknowledged that the truth we seek is embodied in Jesus Christ, and certainly Jesus Christ was held up throughout the reflection as model and teacher, no effort was really made to explore the link between truth and freedom.<sup>20</sup> The Church was given the central place in the account of the third theme, "Spirit of Unity – Reconcile your People." The Church is a *koinōnia*, a community brought into being by our participation in the one body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Its unity is modelled on the communion of the Triune God and is a real sharing in that trinitarian life.<sup>21</sup> The prayer for reconciliation in the title led easily to a discussion of ecumenism, itself a work of the Spirit. The document recognized that what the ecumenical movement lacked was an agreement on ecclesiology. It recommended the image of the Church as a *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit as a starting point.<sup>22</sup>

In its account of the final subtheme, "Holy Spirit – Transform and Sanctify us," the book of resources for Canberra used the overlapping notions of transformation, renewal, and sanctification to describe the Spirit's action for which we were praying. It then looked in turn at the Church, society, and creation as three locations for the Spirit's trans-

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 5–6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 24–28.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 56–57.

forming activity, and finally it discussed fundamental dimensions of Christian spirituality or life in the Spirit. Throughout this document one can find clear traces of the particular themes to which the Orthodox gave priority in their own consultation, especially in the section on the Church with its sacramental and eucharistic focus, and the way in which it highlighted the role of saints. The Spirit's transforming activity in society and the whole of creation calls Christians to be agents of transformation and bearers of hope. They do not initiate the work for justice and peace because the Spirit is already at work in the world.<sup>23</sup> A small paragraph almost sums up the basic thrust of the whole pre-assembly document, despite its lack of an ecclesiological reference.

Christians believe that the whole creation belongs to God, and that the Spirit is always at work in the world and within history for the transformation and renewal of individuals, the social order and all of creation. This is the basis for all their particular commitments to issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.<sup>24</sup>

There is no way of ascertaining to what extent the resources provided for delegates shaped their own perspective on the themes and issues they discussed. Nonetheless it is probably fair to say that the treatment of all but the last subtheme would have drawn delegates towards a discussion of issues rather than of the theology put forward by way of introduction. This proved to be true in the assembly itself. In fact, most subsections were directed to discuss an issue related to their subtheme rather than the initial theological statement which would be part of the final document from their section. Some of these issues had a significant theological dimension but, even then, it is very hard for an extremely diverse group of people meeting for the first time to draft a serious theological statement in a very short space of time.

While the issues raised for delegates in *Resources for Sections* were many and diverse, in the assembly itself most came together under the headings which had emerged in the pre-assembly period: justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; theological issues raised by the Commission on Faith and Order, especially that of the goal of Christian unity; issues raised by the particular perspective of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches; issues raised by dialogue with other faiths.

#### JUSTICE, PEACE, AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

The Seoul Convocation of March 1990 was the result of a process initiated in 1983 at the Vancouver Assembly which had called on the member churches to engage in a process of "mutual commitment (cove-

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 76-77.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 83.



nant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation."<sup>25</sup> An act of covenanting did take place at the end of the Seoul Convocation. It included ten affirmations about justice, peace, and creation which touched upon many of the major issues of concern in the lives of Christians and, indeed, of all people in the world today. The theological foundation for these affirmations was not very extensive, given the nature of the document and the greater emphasis on concrete issues at the actual convocation.

Its simplest statement would be as follows. First, God who is the giver of life will not abandon creation but rather continues to be present in it as its sustaining power. "God is alive in all that breathes and grows."<sup>26</sup> Second, God has made a covenant not only with humanity but with the whole of creation. Third, human beings have been created to be partners with God, witnessing to God's covenant. Fourth, God's covenant was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "Through the resurrection of Christ, God's irrevocable yes to life has become manifest."<sup>27</sup> Fifth, baptism initiates people into this new covenant relationship and the Eucharist is an anticipation here and now of God's reign of justice and peace, the new heaven and new earth. Participants in Eucharist are united to Christ who identifies with all who suffer injustice or violence. Finally, Christian discipleship today demands a radical commitment to this covenant God has made and renewed with humanity and the whole of creation and, hence, a radical commitment to furthering justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. There was really no specific account of the work of the Holy Spirit in creation other than a rather vague reference to "the healing work of the Spirit in all creation."<sup>28</sup> From the perspective of the Canberra Assembly, the Seoul Convocation was important less for its theology of creation<sup>29</sup> or of the Holy Spirit, than for introducing the broad ethical perspective which "the whole creation" presented into the center of pre-assembly deliberations, and into the assembly itself.

### *Roman Catholic Perspectives*

The Seoul Convocation was not without its critics,<sup>30</sup> not least of all from the Roman Catholic side. The Catholic Church had been invited to

<sup>25</sup> *Now is the Time. The Final Document and Other Texts. World Convocation on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Seoul 1990* (Geneva: WCC, 1990) 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>29</sup> The JPIC process did generate considerable theological reflection along the way, e.g. *Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989) 492-602; Ulrich Duchrow and Gerhard Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspective on Creation, Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Janice Love, "JPIC and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement," *Ecumenical Review* 43 (1991) 107-19; Jerry D. McCoy, "A Promise Partially Fulfilled: The JPIC Convocation in Seoul," *Mid-Stream* 29 (1990) 407-17.

be a cosponsor but had not done so because of "unresolved difficulties."<sup>31</sup> One officially named difficulty was the perennial one of the different nature of the two bodies, the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>32</sup> However, Jerry D. McCoy is surely right in citing Roman Catholic concerns about the meaning and nature of the "conciliar process" which was to take place in Seoul. This concern had already arisen for Catholics and Orthodox in Basel, at the European Ecumenical Assembly, *Peace with Justice*, sponsored by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE).<sup>33</sup> This earlier meeting was a very successful forerunner to the Seoul Convocation. A further cause for concern was the decision to include in the convocation representatives of various movements for justice, peace, and ecology. Finally, the Council for Promoting Christian Unity has expressed increasing concern about what it perceives to be an inadequate theological foundation for the positions taken by WCC meetings on issues of justice, peace, and now ecology.<sup>34</sup>

#### *An Open Letter*

This latter issue is not problematic only for the pontifical Council. In his report as General Secretary to an opening plenary of the Canberra Assembly, Emilio Castro referred to a group of Christian ethicists who had expressed their concern about "unqualified statements of the kind found in reports of our conferences."<sup>35</sup> He was referring to an unofficial group which had gathered in Vancouver the previous July to reflect on ecumenical social thought in the programs of the WCC, in particular on the final document of the Seoul Convocation, and which had sent him an "open letter" as a result of their meeting. Many of the participants had been involved in some way or other in WCC programs of social thought and action, and they called themselves "friends of the World Council of Churches."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Sixth Report* (Geneva: WCC, 1990) 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Joseph A. Selling, "The 'Conciliar Process' for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: The European Experience," *Louvain Studies* 14 (1989) 353-54.

<sup>34</sup> "Letter of Archbishop Edward I. Cassidy to Dr. Emilio Castro," *Information Service. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* 74 (1990) 57.

<sup>35</sup> "Report of the General Secretary," Document PL 2.1, World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February, 1991, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> "An Open Letter to Dr. Emilio Castro, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches," Vancouver, Canada, July 27, 1990. Those who signed the letter were: Terence R. Anderson (Moderator), Paul Abrecht, Keith Bridston, Nancy L. Cocks, R. Bruce Douglass, John Francis, David Gill, Max Kohnstamm, Jurnas Kokla, Gunter Krusche,

In their letter the signatories criticized the JPIC Report from the Seoul Convocation for appearing to insist in an absolutist way on one ethical norm to the exclusion of all others, when, as they saw it, faith rarely prescribes precise answers to the world's complex problems. Only rarely are beliefs and actions so contrary to the Christian faith that following them is "to break Christian community (*status confessionis*)."<sup>37</sup> Heinz-Joachim Held, Moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC, addressed this issue in his own Report at an opening plenary of the Canberra Assembly. He reiterated that the ten affirmations of Seoul were affirmations of faith because they linked the confession of faith with commitment to corresponding action. They illustrated the unity of faith and life, theological conviction, and moral action. While as acts of convenanting they represented the commitment only of those present, they are intended to be taken up as commitments by the churches themselves.<sup>38</sup> Neither he nor Emilio Castro addressed the basic concern of the signatories that the Seoul Report was too exclusive in its approach to ethical questions or their warning that the WCC would betray its mission if it became "a contender in an arena of partisans, all claiming God's endorsement for their acts and opinions."<sup>39</sup>

The Vancouver group argued that the way forward for ecumenical social thought which would enable it to avoid the above danger was to recover the qualities of dialogue, analysis, and study. Because these were lacking, they perceived ecumenical social thought as illustrating a poor understanding of social problems, offering an imprecise guidance to conscience, and violating the rights of those not adequately defended in ecumenical debate. More investigation and genuine dialogue were needed. "This may result in fewer resolutions and declarations than in recent years, but more solid analyses; less ideological rigidity, but more substantive understanding of differing convictions; deeper agreement, where agreement is reached, in policy and action."<sup>40</sup> They also called for the recognition that the role of any council of churches, and so the WCC, in formulating a common Christian witness on social issues, was not to think *for* the churches, which they perceived as a papal approach. Their role was to facilitate the ecumenical study of such issues between the churches and between the churches and the world. Statements by the council itself were only one step in this process and not its climax.

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Peter Macek, Ronald Preston, Gordon Schultz, Roger Shinn, Luisa A. S. Vicioso, Charles West, and Vernon Wishart.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>38</sup> "Moderator's Report," Document No. PL 7.1, World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> "An Open Letter" 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

*Canberra Assembly*

One fears that the Vancouver group may not be any more impressed by the reports produced by the first two sections at the Canberra Assembly, "Giver of Life – Sustain Your Creation" and "Spirit of Truth – Set us Free." They do not take the theological discussion much further than the theology of *Resources for Sections*. Both sets of documents move rather quickly from an underdeveloped theological base to a rather comprehensive program for social action. The Canberra report from the first section offers some thoughtful suggestions for a contemporary theology of creation and then modestly calls for further exploration of this theme on a worldwide basis by the WCC. It also attempts, at greater length, to offer some insights for an "ethic of economy and ecology." The second report offers only one page outlining its theological perspective in a sixteen page document. It was the more controversial of the two. Both were criticized in one of the final plenaries for failing to relate ecclesiology and the quest for unity to their themes. The former was criticized for not dealing adequately with eschatology in relation to creation and our human efforts to establish a new order in the world. The latter was criticized for its failure to relate Christology to its rather slender pneumatological foundation. Both reports, but especially the second, concentrated their energies on a description of the parlous state of the world and recommendations to bring about a change. Their stance was somewhat prophetic and hence, given their sometimes rather precise prescriptions for reform, they are not quite the modest instruments for dialogue with the world recommended by the Vancouver group.

In its report to the assembly the Committee on Program Policy recommended carrying forward the JPIC process begun in Seoul but added the important conditions, "provided we develop a rigorous social analysis" and "deepen our theological reflection."<sup>41</sup> If this condition is fulfilled, there is a chance that future reflection by the various subunits of the WCC and meetings organized by it will produce less controversial documents but ones which will in the long run have a more lasting and beneficial effect upon the member churches as they deal with the vital issues of JPIC which confront them in the contemporary world. There might also be grounds for hoping that official Roman Catholic involvement in their reflection processes and projects would be less tentative than it is at the moment.

## FAITH AND ORDER: THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The Commission on Faith and Order this year published its third draft of an "ecumenical explication of the apostolic faith as it is confessed in

<sup>41</sup> "Report of the Committee on Programme Policy," *Ecumenical Review* 43 (1991) 278.

the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381).<sup>42</sup> This is a further stage in only one part of a larger program, "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today," which will involve explication, common recognition, and common confession. Because of the enormous amount of ecumenically sensitive theological discussion over almost ten years which has given birth to this latest published draft, and because such an explication inevitably has to deal with both the Holy Spirit and creation, Canberra's linked themes, it deserves serious study as part of the context for the Canberra Assembly.

From beginning to end, it links the work of one person of the Trinity to that of the other two. At the same time, it continually moves from the work of the Trinity in creation to the work of the Trinity in the new creation. It is trinitarian and eschatological throughout. The FOC account does not attempt to resolve the controversial issue of the activity of the Holy Spirit outside the Church. It simply acknowledges that some of its members would claim that the Spirit is active only within the Church while some would recognize everything that is good in the lives of non-Christians as coming from the Holy Spirit. Others would claim that this sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in history is hidden from our eyes.<sup>43</sup> It does acknowledge that the Holy Spirit continues to speak to the Jewish people through their holy Scriptures.<sup>44</sup>

*Würzburg, June 1988*

In the light of its Apostolic Faith Study, the FOC undertook its own review of the theme and subthemes for the Canberra Assembly, in Würzburg, June 12–19, 1988. Over thirty participants were involved in the consultation including Roman Catholics, as the Catholic Church is a full member of the FOC. Three major emphases emerged in the final report: the role and place of the Holy Spirit within the trinitarian communion; the Holy Spirit within the community and in relationship to believers; and the operation of the Holy Spirit outside as well as inside the Church.<sup>45</sup>

A background paper was presented by the Danish theologian Anna Marie Aagaard. It explored the role of the Holy Spirit from a classical Lutheran perspective quite at odds with the prevailing focus in the pre-assembly documents. For her, pneumatology was seen to answer the

<sup>42</sup> As this publication was still at the printers, references are to a revised edition of the June 1990 draft (FO/90:1), which was the all-but-final draft prior to publication, "New Revised Edition. Confessing the One Faith."

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 64.

<sup>45</sup> FO/89.13A, October 1989, "Consultation on Ecumenical Reflections on the Holy Spirit in Creation, Church and History, Würzburg/FRG, 12–19 June 1989" (FOC Archives, Geneva) 2.

question of how the salvation accomplished by Christ becomes our gift, our faith, and our life. The proper and only work of the Holy Spirit is our sanctification. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ sent to make Christ present in human hearts so that the justification Christ brought about may determine their existence. The Spirit does this by gathering the Christian Church, which is the sign and instrument of the sanctifying Spirit. The Spirit uses preaching, sacraments, and the exercise of the ministry as means of sanctification within the Church but only when these are in accordance with the scriptural witness to Christ. These alone are the means of sanctification of the Holy Spirit. They make the incarnate Word present, creating and sustaining faith in Christ and bringing about in the Church the fruits of Christ's new life.<sup>46</sup>

In their discussion of the first Assembly subtheme, "Giver of Life – Sustain Your Creation," the consultation was assisted by a paper presented by Jean Corbon which took as its central theme the biblical narrative of Noah and the flood.<sup>47</sup> The focus of their report was rather different. It concentrated on the contrast between "giver of life" as a description of God the Creator and the notion of an almighty dominant creator which they thought was the more common perception. The former perception of God's creative activity suggests the abundance, the variety, the interrelatedness, and manifold possibilities for development in creation. Human beings violate these patterns of God's creative activity through domination and competitive relationships. Therefore humankind must be converted to the patterns established by the Spirit given in the gift of life itself.

Discussion of the second subtheme, "Spirit of Truth – Set us Free," was assisted by a paper presented by Jacqueline Grant of Atlanta who would later preach in the Lima Liturgy at the Canberra Assembly. She argued that the Spirit was wholly free, defying all human limitations, undefinable and uncontrollable. The Church has succeeded in defining both God and Christ as white males, which has resulted in a racist, sexist theology. It has tried to imprison the Spirit but has failed. The Holy Spirit is a power which empowers rather than oppresses. It empowers the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. The Holy Spirit can provide an internal critique of the Church's

<sup>46</sup> FO/89.7, June 1989. Anna Marie Aagaard, "The Holy Spirit in the Church in Relation to Creation, Salvation and Fulfillment—from a Lutheran Perspective" (FOC Archives, Geneva) 1-4.

<sup>47</sup> FO/89.13, July 1989, Jean Corbon, "Holy Spirit, Giver of Life: Sustain Your Creation" (FOC Archives, Geneva).

oppressive conceptualizations of God.<sup>48</sup>

The report on this subtheme concentrated on a number of major points. Among these it pointed out that we have already been set free by God in Jesus Christ. Yet we still pray to be set free because our own liberation is incomplete and we are one with the whole of humanity and the whole of creation which awaits the freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:18–25). Focussing on the name given to the Spirit in the sub-theme, Spirit of Truth, it pointed out that Jesus is the truth, and so the freedom that the Spirit gives must be understood in terms of the freedom of God whose love is without limit, a freely given love revealed in Jesus' own death on the cross. The freedom of the Spirit will also be a freedom to suffer on behalf of others because it comes from the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ. Because the liberation of the Spirit is for a life of love in community, a community engaged in a search for God's justice and peace, it will include discerning action in solidarity with other movements for human liberation. However, the report affirmed that the churches bear witness to the unique liberation in Jesus Christ brought about by the Spirit of Truth. While acknowledging the ambiguity inherent in other movements, it also confessed the ambiguities in the Church's own commitment to justice. Though stopping short of an apodictic affirmation of the Spirit's activity in these movements, it concluded with the general statement: "God works even through imperfect instruments for the liberation of all that he has made."<sup>49</sup>

Canon Daniel W. Hardy presented the support paper on the third subtheme, "Spirit of Unity – Reconcile your People." He attempted to develop an "empirico-theoretical" and "performative-normative" framework for the "conditionality" within which this prayer is uttered.<sup>50</sup> The report of the consultation, on the other hand, simply developed the following concise argument. God's creation was originally a harmonious communion among God, human beings, and the whole creation, with all human beings created in the image of God, equal to each other as brothers and sisters. However human beings have destroyed that original harmonious communion. The Spirit of God who dwells in us enables us to appropriate the reconciliation offered to us by God in Jesus Christ and so to become God's people, the new creation, empowered for a ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor 5:16–21). This ministry of reconciliation must

<sup>48</sup> FO/89, June 1989, Jacqueline Grant, "Spirit of Truth: Set us Free" (FOC Archives, Geneva) 1–3.

<sup>49</sup> FO/89.13A, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> FO/89.12, June 1989, Canon Professor Daniel W. Hardy, "Spirit of Unity—Reconcile your People" (FOC Archives, Geneva) 1–38.

to describe the goal of the unity of the Church being striven for in the ecumenical movement. The final statement produced by the third section, renamed "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling," was the only document produced by any section which was open to amendment before voting in a plenary session of the assembly.

The New Delhi Assembly had produced the first really significant description of this goal in 1961. Its emphasis had been on "all in each place" being brought together by the Holy Spirit into "one fully committed fellowship," and at the same time being united with the whole Christian fellowship "in all places and all ages."<sup>54</sup> The Nairobi Assembly of 1975 adopted the FOC language of conciliar fellowship to describe the united Church as "a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united."<sup>55</sup> The key paragraph of the description produced in Canberra on the basis of the FOC draft reads as follows:

The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in: the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realised when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such communion churches are bound in all aspects of their life together at all levels in confessing the one faith and engaging in worship and witness, deliberation and action.<sup>56</sup>

The ecclesiology of koinonia, or communion, once again emerged as the fruitful way forward for ecumenical reflection on the Church.<sup>57</sup> In this the FOC statement was faithful to the original recommendation of *Resources for Sections*.<sup>58</sup> In his report, Heinz-Joachim Held had also prepared the assembly for this development by describing koinonia as "the central concept or rather the decisive reality of living on which

<sup>54</sup> *The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961* (New York: Association, 1962) 116.

<sup>55</sup> David M. Paton, ed., *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November–10 December, 1975* (London: SPCK, 1976) 60.

<sup>56</sup> "Section III Report, Final Version: Spirit of Unity—Reconcile Your People," Document No. SE 3.7, World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7–20 February, 1991, pp. 3–4.

<sup>57</sup> The ecumenical fruitfulness of an ecclesiology of koinonia is well illustrated by the recently published report of ARCIC II, *Church As Communion* (London: CTS, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> See above 11.



everything is meant to converge,"<sup>59</sup> including everything undertaken by the WCC. This new statement integrated the conciliar forms of life and action described at Nairobi into the deeper reality of ecclesiological koinonia. The preceding paragraph in the statement points to the level of communion which already exists between the churches and challenges them to draw the appropriate consequences for their life. In a subsequent paragraph it celebrates diversity as integral to communion but affirms that diversity has its limits, without spelling out in any detail what these are.<sup>60</sup>

The statement also calls the churches to recommit themselves to working for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation and to link more closely the search for sacramental communion with this broader project. The report of the third section went on to recommend that a study be undertaken within the WCC of the ecumenical perspective of ecclesiology and one which would be related to the ecclesiological implications of the JPIC process.<sup>61</sup> These recommendations illustrate a vital need within ecumenical theology and practice at the moment. There is a tendency for the movement for church unity (the traditional Faith and Order focus) and the movement for world transformation (the JPIC focus) to diverge.

#### *Canberra Assembly*

This divergence was apparent from the first presentations in the assembly to its concluding plenary sessions. The two opening presentations on the theme of the assembly were made by Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, and by Chung Hyun-Kyung of South Korea. The former presented a classical Orthodox theology of the Holy Spirit which was intensely trinitarian and ecclesiological. In sharp contrast the latter very prophetically called the assembly to commit itself to the Holy Spirit's political-economy of life. In a manner calculated to draw together these divergent emphases, Dr. Mary Tanner, a Vice-Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, introduced the subtheme of the third section, "Spirit of Unity: Reconcile Your People." She stressed the interrelationship between the FOC commitment and the JPIC commitment. Without the latter, the former can turn the Church into an inward looking, self-interested group of people. Without the former, the latter can become simply another secular movement. However, rather than drawing these

<sup>59</sup> "Moderator's Report" 10.

<sup>60</sup> In his contribution to the collection of preparatory articles for the assembly, J. M.-R. Tillard, O.P. dealt with the theological notion of "reconciled diversity" and more fully with the limits to diversity in an ecclesiology of communion ("Spirit, Reconciliation, Church," *Ecumenical Review* 42 [1990] 237-49).

<sup>61</sup> "Section III Report" 5.

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<sup>61</sup> "Section III Report" 5.

two movements or emphases together, the Canberra Assembly once more illustrated their tendency to diverge, to the considerable frustration of many delegates. The Committee on Program Policy needed to remind the assembly that if a reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the mission of the Church, then this requires that the quest for Christian unity be more closely linked with the struggle for justice and peace. "Both these dimensions point to the Church as the healing communion in Christ through the Holy Spirit."<sup>62</sup> The Faith and Order Commission had anticipated this recommendation with its latest study text, *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of the Human Community*,<sup>63</sup> which deals with such topics as the relationship between the search for justice and Christian unity. Those involved in the JPIC process need to make a similar effort to ground their project on a richer theological base which would include a substantial ecclesiology. This is a rather urgent requirement for the WCC and the ecumenical movement as a whole.

#### ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

While Eastern and Oriental Orthodox representatives participated fully in the drafting process for the preparatory resource documents on the theme and subthemes, they held their own consultation in Crete, November 25 to December 4, 1989. The report of this consultation was included in the final pre-assembly publication of theological reflections on the Canberra theme.<sup>64</sup> At the beginning of their report the Orthodox outlined some of the fundamental principles which undergird their theology of the Holy Spirit. These principles manifest themselves intermittently throughout the pre-assembly documents, bearing witness to the specific contribution of the Orthodox to the reflection on the theme and subthemes.

The first two of these principles are the most fundamental of all for the Orthodox. The theology of the Holy Spirit must be placed within a trinitarian context; and pneumatology must not be separated from Christology.<sup>65</sup> By relating the action of the Holy Spirit always to the action of the Father and of the Son, that structure of trinitarian theology is preserved whereby all three persons of the Trinity are involved in any action of God in creation or redemption. They always operate in unity but each person in a different manner. By ensuring that there is always a link between pneumatology and Christology, the Spirit's role of always working with Christ and of pointing to Christ is protected. Archbishop

<sup>62</sup> "Report of the Committee on Programme Policy" 278.

<sup>63</sup> FO Paper No. 151 (Geneva: WCC, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> *To the Wind of God's Spirit* 87-98. <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 88.

Aram Keshishian of Lebanon had delivered a paper to the Crete consultation which strongly emphasized this trinitarian context for any reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit. One of his hopes for the Canberra Assembly was that it would reduce what he perceived to be the excessive Christocentrism of the WCC and bring to the fore instead a trinitarian pneumatology.<sup>66</sup>

John Breck of St. Vladimir's Seminary, New York, had presented a paper which more than any other dealt with the fundamental link between Christology and pneumatology. He alerted the consultation to a danger he saw arising from some charismatic and liberation movements of separating the work of the Spirit from that of Christ. He was also critical of a tendency in the writing of Vladimir Lossky to speak of a double economy, one of the Son and one of the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup> Welcoming the pneumatological Christology advanced by Boris Bobrinskoy, he was himself attempting to provide the scriptural foundation for a Christological pneumatology, basing himself especially upon St. John's Gospel. Just as Bobrinskoy could speak of the Holy Spirit as the one who precedes Christ, accompanies Christ, constitutes him, penetrates him, follows him, and springs from him,<sup>68</sup> so Breck sought to show that it is the eternal Logos who "determines, constitutes and communicates the mystery of the Spirit."<sup>69</sup> The Spirit's role in the divine economy is only to communicate the Word of God and to sanctify the faithful by uniting them to the Word. Though separated chronologically, the Passover and Pentecost are not separated economically. The economy of the Spirit and the economy of the Son are one. Therefore, to pray for the coming of the Spirit is in fact to pray in the Spirit for the return in glory of the Son.<sup>70</sup>

The remaining foundational principles for an Orthodox theology of the Holy Spirit were all linked together. Starting with the transcendence of God, the report argued that the purpose of the Triune God's and therefore of the Holy Spirit's activity in creation and redemption is to offer to human beings and, through them, to the whole of creation, the possibility of transcending their creaturely limitations and so entering into the glory and life of God (Rom 8:20-21). This finds expression in the Orthodox soteriological theme of *theōsis*. This transcendence achieved by the Holy Spirit draws creation into communion with the Triune God and, by

<sup>66</sup> Aram Keshishian, "The Assembly Theme: More Orthodox Perspective," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (1990) 204.

<sup>67</sup> John Breck, "The Lord is the Spirit': an Essay in Christological Pneumatology," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (1990) 115.

<sup>68</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy, "The Holy Spirit in the Bible and the Church," *Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989) 358.

<sup>69</sup> Breck, "The Lord is the Spirit" 116.      <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 120-21.

liberating creatures from self-sufficiency and individualism, draws them also into a communion both of human beings with each other and also with the whole of creation.

Following on from this principle the report focused on the centrality of ecclesiology in Orthodox thought. This transcendent destiny of the whole of creation “somehow passes through the Church, where the world finds its true meaning and salvation.”<sup>71</sup> This does not mean that the Spirit is limited to working within the institutional church but the Church is the communion which the Holy Spirit assembles and creates as the place where creation is liberated from its self-sufficiency. By the repentance and baptism of the members of the Church creation is purified and, in Eucharist, it passes through the hands of the ecclesial communion, to become an offering to God. The anthropological principle flowing from this for the Orthodox was that the sanctification achieved by the Holy Spirit transforms human beings into those who see God and share God’s glory. They are given a real foretaste of the eschatological kingdom of God, and the world finds in the Church a window opening onto that kingdom.

Papers were delivered in Crete on each of the subthemes of the assembly and the report dealt with each subtheme in turn. The principles just outlined were expressed in one way or another in each of these more specific reports, but naturally there was some further elaboration. The consultation’s most interesting contribution to the reflection on the second subtheme at Canberra was probably its very emphatic affirmation that the Spirit is not limited or contained exclusively by the Church. The Spirit “blows where it wills” (John 3:8). It becomes the task of Christians then “to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit wherever the fruits of the Spirit are seen and to call upon the power of the Spirit in all situations where truth is disfigured and freedom misused.”<sup>72</sup> The report’s reflection on the third subtheme, “Spirit of Unity – Reconcile your People,” called for the formal proclamation of the sacramental and ecclesial unity of Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches.<sup>73</sup>

#### *Canberra Assembly*

In the assembly itself Orthodox delegates spoke in every plenary with a passionate determination to ensure that the theological work of the assembly was based on the sound trinitarian and ecclesiological founda-

<sup>71</sup> *To the Wind of God’s Spirit* 89.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 92. See also the paper presented to the consultation by Gennadios Limouris, “Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation: Pneumatology in Symphony with Christology,” in Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation* 13.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 93–94.

tion that they had outlined in their pre-assembly contributions. Their rising frustration at the directions the assembly appeared to be taking prompted them to produce a statement of concern in its closing stages. The penultimate sentence of this statement asked the question: "Has the time come for the Orthodox Churches and other member churches to review their relations with the World Council of Churches?"<sup>74</sup> Much had happened for them since Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, had declared to the assembly in his paper read in the opening plenary, "The Orthodox Church has been in the World Council of Churches from the beginning. It will always remain a member of it."<sup>75</sup> Their causes for concern were named as follows: that the restoration of the visible unity of the Church remain the main aim of the WCC; that there has been an increasing departure from the "Basis" of the WCC; that there has been a growing departure from biblically based Christian understandings of central doctrines; that the WCC is broadening in the direction of relations with other religions; that there was a tendency in the assembly to substitute a private spirit, the spirit of the world, or other spirits for the Holy Spirit; that there was a lack of understanding shown for the Orthodox position on intercommunion; and that there was a changing process of decision making in the WCC. These issues were seen to place in question the very nature and identity of the WCC.

The first three issues are related to the matters already discussed. The Orthodox expressed particular concern that the quest for unity and the theological work of the Commission on Faith and Order be given a central place in the program of the WCC. Like so many others, they were disturbed by the lack of a substantial theological foundation for some of the material being produced by the WCC. Therefore, they recalled the assembly to the "Basis" of membership in the WCC: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." They feared that without a strong commitment to each of the elements named in the "Basis," the WCC was in danger "of ceasing to be an instrument aiming at the restoration of Christian unity and, in that case, it would tend to become a forum for an exchange of opinions without any specific Christian theological basis."<sup>76</sup> These were strong words but they would have been echoed by many

<sup>74</sup> "Reflections of Orthodox Participants," Document No. AS4. World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February, 1991 p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, "The Holy Spirit." Document No. PL 3.2 World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> "Reflections of Orthodox Participants" 1-2.

others at the assembly.

The paragraph expressing their concern that other spirits were being substituted for the Holy Spirit contained a quotation, by way of example, from the opening presentation on the assembly theme by Chung Hyun-Kyung of South Korea. This was the most controversial presentation at the assembly and required the programming of an additional plenary to deal with the debate it caused, especially the claim that it was syncretistic. Chung Hyun-Kyung had begun her presentation by calling into the assembly various spirits, e.g., the spirit of Hagar, the spirit of male babies killed by Herod, the spirit of victims of the Crusades, the spirit of Jewish people killed in the Holocaust, the spirit of earth, air, and water raped, tortured and exploited by human greed.<sup>77</sup> It was these last spirits that the Orthodox statement singled out. Her argument was that, in her Korean understanding, these spirits were full of *han* or anger. They need to be listened to if we are to right the wrongs that have made them victims. "Without hearing the cries of these spirits, we cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit . . . For us they are the icons of the Holy Spirit who became tangible and visible to us."<sup>78</sup> In the rest of her paper Chung Hyun-Kyung invited the delegates to participate in the Holy Spirit's political economy for life by first hearing the cries for life of oppressed peoples and the earth itself and recognizing signs of liberation already taking place, both of which would be evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in suffering creation.

This presentation raised two issues for the Orthodox and others, though not this presentation alone. First, the Orthodox expressed concern that there was a too easy attribution to the Holy Spirit of the authorship for diverse movements and developments which could also be the result of the spirit of the world or one's personal spirit, given the reality of sin and error in all human activity. This was more than an issue of discernment, though it certainly was that. Just as ecclesiological documents in the past too easily relegated the work of the Holy Spirit to an unexplained adverbial phrase, "through the Holy Spirit," so there was a tendency in Canberra, when addressing justice issues, to place the Holy Spirit as the subject of sentences, equally without explanation, e.g., "The Holy Spirit leads us to . . . The Holy Spirit challenges us to . . ."

This facile attribution of authorship to the Holy Spirit raises again the question of supplying an adequate theological foundation for claims as to the appropriate Christian attitude on some questions of justice. Only

<sup>77</sup> Chung Hyun-Kyung (South Korea), "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation: An Introduction to the Theological Theme," Document No. PL 3.3, World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February, 1991, pp. 1-2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

by linking pneumatology to Christology and ecclesiology in a truly trinitarian theology can such facile claims be avoided.

The second issue for the Orthodox and a number of other delegates was that of syncretism. They thought Chung Hyun-Kyung had exceeded the bounds of what was acceptable in the integration of cultural and non-Christian religious elements into Christian theology. Her presentation highlighted in Canberra the controversial issues of contextual and liberation theology. In her final response to the specially organized debate she described it as a debate about where one finds one's norm for Christian theology today. Fundamentally, this was a question of power. Male Western hierarchs had for too long dominated the transmission of the faith. Now it was time to listen to the voices of the poor and the voices from other cultural contexts. There was no resolution of this issue in Canberra and no reconciliation between strongly divided partisans. Consequently the recommendation of the Committee on Program Policy takes on a special urgency: that the WCC efforts to develop a "vital and coherent theology" bring contextual theologies into dialogue with what it called "classical" theologies. Its criteria for the kind of theology that such a dialogue would produce were that it be faithful to the apostolic faith and appreciative of local cultures through which the gospel is expressed and lived.<sup>79</sup>

The report from the fourth section, "Holy Spirit – Transform and Sanctify Us," is the most theologically integrated of all the reports produced in Canberra. The presentation on this subtheme in the opening plenary had been given by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon. More than any other this report met the criteria of the Orthodox delegates. It was trinitarian, ecclesiological, and affirmed that "the primary criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ."<sup>80</sup> The difference between this document and those produced by the other three sections probably arises from the fact that all of the issues it had to address were related to spirituality. Hence they were able to be included in a well-integrated document with a thoroughly theological approach.

#### DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE OF LIVING FAITHS

The Orthodox concern about syncretism which had focussed particularly on the presentation of Dr. Chung Hyun-Kyung highlighted one of the major issues of the Canberra Assembly. Already, as has been noted,

<sup>79</sup> "Report of the Committee on Programme Policy" 277.

<sup>80</sup> "Section IV Report, Final Version: Holy Spirit—Transform and Sanctify Us," Document No. SE 4.6. World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7–20 February, 1991, p. 5.



there was concern expressed in 1990 after the Baar Consultation and the Pre-Assembly Multi-Faith Dialogue in Hong Kong, both organized by the WCC Sub-Unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. In *Resources for Sections* the issue emerged again in the treatment of the third subtheme, "Spirit of Unity – Reconcile Your People." In addition to its concentration on the koinonia of the Holy Spirit, the document also reflected on the Church as the community of God's people. This raised the question of those who are not members of the Church. Concerning the Jews who became God's people through the covenant with Israel, it challenged Christians to accept them as such even though they do not confess faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God.<sup>81</sup> Concerning people of other faiths, it pointed out that Christians engaged in dialogue with them have often experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit among them.<sup>82</sup> Later it acknowledged that whether Christians should seek to discern the presence of the Spirit outside the context of confession of faith in Jesus Christ was becoming an important question for Christians.<sup>83</sup> The document was also interspersed with references to the reconciling Spirit breaking down all barriers and creating an inclusive community. It concluded as follows:

The Church is called to be a sign of the reign of God. It is a community of people brought forth by the word of truth to be a kind of first-fruits of God's creatures, a foretaste of the new humanity. The Spirit is not tied to nations, cultures, castes, classes or gender, not even to the church. God's mission is wider than the mission of the church.<sup>84</sup>

In the collection *To the Wind of God's Spirit*, there had been an article on the Holy Spirit and other faiths by Stanley J. Samartha, the first director of the Sub-Unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. He tackled the question of whether one could speak of the Spirit working within other faiths. While he acknowledged that theological work in this area was only just beginning, his own conclusion was clearly positive. As he saw it, fear of syncretism or relativism and general theological confusion about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit were hindering the theological task. Therefore his own approach was to ask if Christians could discern the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the lives of adherents to other faiths. If they could, and he believed they could, then surely Christians should acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the other faiths. No more succinctly did he throw down the gauntlet for those at Canberra who would find it difficult to accept this positive appreciation of other

<sup>81</sup> *Resources for Sections* 55.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 53.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 59. See e.g., "Implications of Sub-theme I," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (1990) 314–16.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 55.

faiths than when he argued: "Without being in God, one cannot produce the fruits of the Spirit of God. For Christians to be in Christ is indeed to be in God. But in a religiously plural world, to be in Christ is not the only way to be in God."<sup>85</sup>

### *Canberra Assembly*

In his report as General Secretary at the assembly itself, Emilio Castro invited the delegates to discern the signs of the Holy Spirit's action in the religious experience of people of other faiths. He acknowledged that this had been a divisive theme at the previous assembly in Vancouver. Seeking a methodology for constructive coparticipation in building human society he called for a theology "that could be developed in ecumenical reflection, from a Trinitarian perspective, to provide recognition of the value and role and vocation of other religions in God's providential plan, and at the same time to integrate our testimony to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, in that recognition."<sup>86</sup>

Section Three, "Spirit of Unity – Reconcile Your People," took up this question within the assembly. Its final report did not offer any theological resolution of the debate surrounding this issue. It acknowledged that there were continuing problems about the understanding of religious plurality and God's relationship to people of other religious faiths. Nonetheless it called very strongly for the continuance of interfaith dialogue and described the Holy Spirit as calling both for faith in the Christ and for an encounter in dialogue with the faith of others.<sup>87</sup> This call for the continuance of dialogue was reiterated in the report of the Committee on Program Policy.<sup>88</sup> Ultimately Canberra came no closer to a resolution of this issue which has proved to be so problematic within the WCC.

### CONCLUSION

An assembly of the World Council of Churches is an extraordinary ecumenical event. For many delegates and visitors to Canberra the common worship and fellowship were such evident experiences of the renewing power of the Holy Spirit that they far outweighed the tensions described above. At the same time, precisely because a WCC assembly is such an extraordinary ecumenical experience, the concerns and tensions which were raised there deserve very serious consideration by the wider ecumenical community. They are not unique to the WCC. What emerged

<sup>85</sup> Stanley J. Samartha, "The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths," in *To the Wind of God's Spirit* 59.

<sup>86</sup> "Report of the General Secretary" 10. <sup>87</sup> "Section III Report, Final Version" 9.

<sup>88</sup> "Report of the Committee on Programme Policy" 279.

in Canberra were only the issues that confront the churches individually and collectively in this very complex ecumenical movement. Because they emerged so clearly in the assembly, these issues cannot be ignored. If the WCC can seize the moment and respond to the challenges with which it was confronted in Canberra, it will not only become a more effective ecumenical body but it will also offer a great service to the wider ecumenical movement. If it fails to meet these challenges it can only expect increasing frustration and criticism from its member churches. From all that has been said the following would seem to be the more important questions which need addressing:

1. The commitments asked of the churches through the JPIC process need to be more rigorously grounded in Christian theology. Otherwise they will lack a uniquely Christian perspective on justice, peace, and the integrity of creation and hence will be indistinguishable from similar commitments called for by secular movements for social change. The practical commitments may often be the same but the Christian perspective has both a different starting point and a different final goal, given the revelation of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Christian soteriology and eschatology ought to play a part in the description of any commitment asked of Christian churches. The JPIC process is too important for it to fail. Unless its invitation to the churches to become involved is well grounded theologically it may well flounder for lack of compelling argument. Moreover such an invitation needs to show how such commitments are related to the rest of the life of the Church which will only be possible if there is also a strong ecclesiological basis to the JPIC process. Its ethical approach and its style of analysis would seem to need further debate within the WCC and among its member churches if greater consensus is to be reached. The process is too important for one school of thought so to dominate that consensus among concerned Christians is unable to be achieved. A too narrow ethical approach and a too limited social analysis will only result in the secular world ignoring the challenge from the churches because it is able to reject or dismantle the ethical or scientific foundation of the statements produced. Too much is at stake here for any "political" wings within the WCC and its member churches to seek to win their own internal battles at the expense of the larger project.

2. In the Canberra Assembly it became apparent that the quest for Christian unity, and so issues of faith and order, were no longer the major concern of many delegates. If this is true as well of the churches they represented, then something very significant has happened in the ecumenical movement. There were many protestations of commitment to church unity in plenary presentations but the energy of the assembly

was not to be found in that direction. This was a cause of considerable concern to many delegates, including the Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants. There were many committed workers for Christian unity in Canberra but their painstaking struggles and achievements seemed to be sidelined into an area at considerable distance from the main concerns of the assembly which were in the area of the JPIC process. If the world, as it was said, wrote the agenda for the churches in Uppsala 1968, then they were still so engrossed in that agenda in Canberra 1991 that they barely bothered to look at themselves. However unless the churches become the *koinonia* they are called to be, their very efforts to carry through the JPIC project will be vitiated by their separation and so failure to witness to the very goal they desire to achieve for the world.

One reason for this development may be that the criteria laid down by the Commission on Faith and Order for the restoration of Christian unity, which would be heartily endorsed by Orthodox and Roman Catholics among others, might appear in the eyes of some to be too demanding or, rather, easily realized, if it were not for the obstinacy of those churches which so heartily endorse them. Perhaps some churches would be content with the level of agreement already possible in the confession of the apostolic faith and would have no difficulty in recognizing and reconciling each other's ministries. Orthodox and Roman Catholics and some others are conspicuous in making this a lengthy and demanding process. The fact that delegates from almost all churches except the two just named participated fully in the Lima Liturgy by way of intercelebration and/or intercommunion would reinforce this conclusion. The Orthodox bore witness in the assembly to an approach to the ecumenical movement and its goals which no longer seemed to capture the imagination of the majority of delegates. Unless the WCC tackles this problem there will be increasing disenchantment on the part of those churches who place at the centre of their ecumenical concern the restoration of visible unity. It would be easier for the WCC if some churches were not so demanding when it comes to fulfilling the FOC criteria for the restoration of unity. However, they cannot be less demanding without being unfaithful to the gospel as they understand it. They cannot unite or celebrate Eucharist together until many more issues have been resolved. Unless the call of the Orthodox for greater engagement in working for the resolution of these difficulties on the part of the WCC is taken seriously, then the WCC will limit its capacity to serve this fundamental ecumenical process and will marginalize some churches or itself within the ecumenical movement.

3. The WCC Assembly revealed to the world the tensions which exist between different theological schools and especially over the relationship

between Christianity and other living faiths. What was apparent in Canberra is equally apparent in theological faculties around the world. The WCC is uniquely placed to bring partisans of differing and conflicting schools of thought into dialogue. If it can do so, it will offer a great service to its member churches, and would certainly fulfill the mandate they have given it.

Assemblies of the WCC occur only every seven years. This latest assembly provided participants with all the excitement and encouragement that they could have hoped for. An enormously hard-working staff from Geneva and Australia achieved a monumental task to make that possible. At the same time, this assembly raised serious questions about future WCC work. The WCC has shown in the past that it can rise to the occasion when challenged to deal with difficult issues. It is to be hoped that it does so again. Its contribution to the ecumenical movement is vital, even crucial, but so are the issues which Canberra raised.