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The Search for a New World Community ?

J. ANDREW KIRK

Some Quotations

THE purpose of including the following short passages is to allow the reader to savour something of the 'hot-pot' served up by the WCC as preparatory study material for certain basic themes (sections 4-6) to be discussed in Nairobi. They represent, of course, a highly personal selection.

But they (the religious leaders) are silent and inactive on the things that really matter, the things that really concern people—social change, land reform, employment, human relationships, human dignity, involvement with the people, being alongside the people in dialogue . . .

(Violent Lanka: the Day for Slaughter, An Interpretation of the Revolt of April 1971.)

He who never travels thinks mother is the only cook.

(Bantu Proverb.)

As long as the Church sees as its duty propagation instead of liberation it cannot be more than another self-aggrandising corporation.

(J. Durham, North American Indian.)

Education is learning. Our educational system is memorising.

Education is learning how to learn. Our educational system is learning how to conform.

Education is the right of every Indian. Our educational system is a denial of education to the majority of Indians . . .

Education is democratic, calling for equalising educational attainments.

Our educational system is elitist, dividing the educated few into intellectual and social hierarchies . . .

(Malcolm S. Adieseshiah, Madras Institute of Development Studies.)

Is this state of unfreedom an inalterable fate? We believe not.

It is tied up with the principles and contradictions of a capitalist economic situation.

(Prof. Karl Nipkow, University of Tubingen.)

If the defence of the present system is bound to succeed,
if it is impossible to eliminate its fundamental violence,
then the only way in which the hope of justice announced in the Gospel
can be lived—

even though this hope is a hope of peace—
is in the revolutionary struggle.

(French Protestant Federation.)

The coming to our land
of the white man and his tribe
has taught us a lesson
bitter as roots
the word of the white man
has the value of dirt.

(James Matthews, South African.)

Migrant workers in Western Europe represent one example of a proletariat

whose labour is systematically exploited by the host country
without their being able to share in the profits of their labour
or the decisions which affect them . . .

(Report on a Conference on 'Christians and the
European Community', London, 1974.)

Those who sit comfortably close to the world's socio-economic pyramid
must be sensitive to the severe limitations their affluence places
on their giving advice to others less well placed.

(From 'Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social
Justice', a statement commended by the WCC Central
Committee for study, comment and action.)

We call on our fellow evangelical Christians to demonstrate repentance
in a Christian discipleship that confronts
the social and political injustice of our nation.

(Evangelicals in the USA.)

The anti-revolutionary prejudice of the institutional Church must be
overcome

without idolising any revolutionary movement.

(Association of Theological Schools in SE Asia.)

The minerals extracted with the sacrifice of their lives,
enrich a certain few and strengthen the industry and the finances of the
rich nations of the earth.

(The Methodist Evangelical Church in Bolivia.)

Are our economies dependent upon growing appetites for consumption,
and do they therefore, through packaging and advertising
as well as through other sales techniques,
foster greed and acquisitiveness?

(From 'A Theological Critique of Scientific Rationality',
Report from a Working Party on Science and Theology.)

Some Statistics

THESE passages represent only small parts of the 199 extracts which make up the 345 pages of the six sections into which the preparatory documents are divided. 74 of these extracts come from European and North American sources; 71 from the Third World and 54 from consultations, conferences and reports.

Significantly, the percentage within these divisions changes quite substantially for the four final sections, which this article will survey. This is largely due to the fact that the second section on 'What unity requires' draws on sources overwhelmingly from the Western World. The percentages are as follows:

	<i>Sections I-VI</i>	<i>Sections I & II</i>	<i>Sections III-VI</i>
Europe and North America	37.2	37.25	37.1
Third World	36.2	20.6	51.55
Mixed (Consultations etc.)	26.6	42.15	11.35

The point of quoting these statistics is not to prove anything very specific, but to highlight certain characteristic trends which have developed in the past few years within what might be called the WCC 'executive élite'. The trends are as follows:

1. The recognition that the Third World is contributing little significant thinking on unity as organic church union.
2. Reliance on Consultations, Commissions and certain unity 'Pace-setters' (Lukas Vischer is quoted five times in Section II), largely from within the European/North American establishment, to represent the more traditional thinking on unity (the one Third World author quoted, José Miguez, proposes a radically different approach to unity).
3. The increasing use of Third World sources to set forth the issues of social justice and liberation (Sections III-VI).

The particular implications adduced from these statistics does not connote any value judgment. The intention is simply to demonstrate that the WCC (as represented by its full-time Staff workers) has shifted ever more rapidly since the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and State from narrow concerns about church union to the wider (*oikoumenē*) issues of international justice and peace.

Some General Observations

THE various extracts which make up the different sections come from a very wide variety of sources. They tend, therefore, to be somewhat disjointed, ambiguous and naturally, at times, contradictory. No guidelines are given with regard to the frames of reference in which

they should be interpreted. However, the 'notes' which precede each section, although they do not represent any official WCC doctrine, do indicate some of the central concerns and beliefs of the compilers of the dossiers.

The extracts, therefore, can only be judged on the merits of the actual selections made, these inevitably inviting comparison with statements of other positions which have been omitted. According to the editorial staff, they represent 'an album of snapshots selected in order to stimulate discussion and draw attention to certain issues . . . likely to arise during the WCC's Fifth Assembly'.

There can be little question that the majority of extracts selected are biased in a pre-determined ideological/ethical direction. On certain issues little or no dissentient voice is expressed and no 'neutral' dialogue in the Western 'liberal' tradition attempted. Indeed, each dossier is almost totally predictable to anyone who has followed the increasing shift to the left on the part of the WCC executive elite.

This bias, except in one crucial case, on issues such as international justice, the environmental crisis, power-structures and modern technology, I find almost wholly acceptable (thus revealing my bias) for reasons to be given later. The one exception is the almost total lack of criticism raised against empirical Communism in any form. The documents are right, therefore in what they assert, namely the inefficacy of contemporary Western civilisation to engage seriously the biblically unacceptable gap between the world's rich and poor, but wrong in what they omit, namely the existence of left-wing injustices (which can also be 'class' injustices) as well. In this respect they do not reflect the non-aligned nations' indignant rejection of the division of the world by the super-powers into 'areas of influence'.

The general bias of Section III on 'inter-faith' dialogue must be exempted from the above broad commendation for reasons we shall give in our separate treatment of the section. Perhaps as a result of the bias demonstrated and the desire to affirm a contextual theological method, largely absent from abstract theological systems, there are remarkably few quotes from German theologians.

Contextuality has meant a largely outward-looking concern on the part of the extracts. They are not pathologically involved with the Churches' inward state, but rather with the pressing spiritual and material needs of the world. This means that some of the documents included demand a certain amount of technical knowledge in the social sciences to appreciate their full force. We intend to leave to the end a discussion of the 'hermeneutical' status of the documents.

Finally, it may well be significant that these sections hardly ventilate the main Assembly theme 'Jesus Christ frees and unites'. A study of their content suggests that the real theme of the Assembly is 'The inter-disciplinary search for a new (World) Community'.

Section III: 'Seeking community—the common search of people of various faiths, cultures and ideologies'

THE theme of Christian unity (Section II) gives way to that of world unity. The section is divided into parts based on various types of context in which an inter-faith discussion necessarily must go on: multi-religious; where struggles for liberation are based on ideological assumptions; primal world-views; where ideological conformity is expected and situations of cultural crisis.

The intention of this section is to show how the resources of different religious ideologies may be used to promote a 'world community of communities' (p. 1).^{*} The need to promote world unity is based on the fact of mutual national interdependence (p. 10) in which one world faces together 'the threats and promises of . . . technological civilisation' (p. 1).

The Churches' role in this search for community has been severely compromised by its long cultural identification with Western greed, exploitation and subjection of dependent peoples. Often both the content of its message and the form of its organisation has been more influenced by ideological considerations (p. 47) than by the Gospel. However, Western civilisation, as far as the dependent peoples are concerned, 'is a dead-end street . . . a dragon that eats its own tail' (p. 37). Therefore, 'the marriage between Christianity and middle-class Capitalism' (p. 49) must formally be pronounced null and void.

Out of the ashes of Christian paternalism will arise an inter-faith dialogue described as 'a talking together concerned with finding a way forward to living together . . . a manner of discovering how to bring together God's offer of communion in Christ and our diverse ways of common human living' (p. 14). Dialogue, according to these extracts, depends upon a minimising of doctrine (p. 8), a maximising of a faith which 'transcends the simple data and also the dogmatic formulations of the different confessions' (p. 9), a renunciation of mission (p. 44) and the unique claims of Jesus (p. 11) and a discovery 'of the inner Christ in the light of the Spirit' in every religion (pp. 11, 17). In a word, it depends on an acceptance of the notion of 'anonymous Christianity' in which, because 'all men stand under the sign of God's saving grace' there is 'the possibility of salvation among men of other religions' (pp. 14, 17). Some documents, it is true, do acknowledge the danger of an undifferentiated syncretism in this approach to dialogue (p. 13), but it is quite casually brushed away with a reference to the syncretism inherent in Western cultural Christianity and to the natural risks involved in any contextual approach to theology.

This part of Section III, in so far as it quotes from documents holding a 'laissez-faire' view of dialogue, is simplistic and misleading.

^{*} Page references in this article are to the six dossiers, not to the booklet *Jesus Christ Frees and Unites*.

The basic weakness, resulting, for example, in a non-acceptance of Christian proclamation leading to decision, springs from a failure to distinguish between the way in which Christianity has often been incarnated during the church's missionary expansion and the irreducible demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whilst it is true that 'traditional-style mission' has been (not always) 'a by-product of colonialism' (p. 46), this does not imply that the Churches should engage upon an insipid dialogue, but that turning from all value-systems inimicable to the Gospel they seek to communicate authentic New Testament Christianity to different cultures.

Dialogue in a Christian context involves the human concern to hear, understand and convey the genuine beliefs of each participant, it can never mean a prior questioning of the absolute and universal claims of the historical Jesus.

That it has meant the latter for some engaged in dialogue (p. 16) is due to the further epistemological confusion that 'truth' is found by uncovering a similar (human) meaning behind *all* religious symbols (p. 8). But this view of truth, which happens to fit well the pan-cosmic embrace of the Hindu mentality, is only one possible one; it also happens to deny the Christian view that truth comes from listening to the unique, historical revelation of the one true God. There is no compelling reason why the Hindu concept should be accepted as an *a priori* condition for a genuine dialogue between men of different faiths and ideologies. Indeed, interestingly enough such a view is rejected by Marxism (p. 45) which, in Communist societies, will not admit any ideological co-existence with other beliefs.

Having made the point, it has to be admitted that Christian missionary preaching has often produced an unbiblical arrogance with regard to other beliefs and an uncreative and lazy rejection of the need to communicate the Gospel contextually (this is the heart of the hermeneutical problem). Christians, thus, have much to learn, for example, about why Buddhists believe that 'non-violent methods are usually the true means of liberation' (p. 26) and Ujamaa (the African form of Socialism) is the only way in Africa 'to ensure the well-being of all citizens, so as to prevent the exploitation of . . . one person . . . or one group by another' (p. 25).

Section IV: 'Education for liberation and community'

THIS section comprises an invitation 'to join with educators in many different countries and churches for a new thrust in education'. There follows a critical survey of generally accepted educational practice as this has been developed in the West and exported to other nations. The survey proceeds on a continental basis, starting with Africa and ending significantly with China. The basic premise of the selected

extracts is that current educational theory, developed historically as a hand-maid to capitalist economic expansion, must rapidly change its orientation. Different reasons for change are given according to the variety of circumstances.

In the Third World, traditional patterns have produced education for failure: rising expectations for white-collar jobs have been shattered by the realities of an under-developed economy (pp. 4, 12); only a very few have struggled to the top, the rest are unable to use their theoretical learning for any suitable work. So the real problem of imported educational techniques is that they are counter-productive. They stand in the way of an integrated development of the whole nation (pp. 13, 18) for the following reasons: they are orientated to a sophisticated technological society but applied to nations still largely dependent on agriculture; they tend to denigrate the true value and dignity of labour by exalting the merits of abstract learning ('book' learning) (pp. 5, 45-46); they promote and legitimise a divided (class) society (pp. 14, 31-32), which works against a co-operative effort to educate the masses in the skills and techniques needed for an indigenous development programme; because literacy does not lead to the promised ideals of the consumer-society, there is little motivation to see education as a continuing process once the ground-work has been laid (pp. 5, 16, 23); finally, imported education has produced illiterates with regard to local culture (pp. 5, 7, 32).

In Europe, education has been pursued in the interests of a recurrent myth, namely that of 'economic growth and the pursuit of private property', which 'stifles our power of imagination and prevents us from considering possible alternatives' (pp. 19-20). An article by Prof. Karl Nipkow, member of a commission on educational policy appointed by the West German Evangelical Churches, seeks to show why those who benefit by Capitalism do not want to change the educational system, although it is basically unjust and inhuman: its purpose being to produce ever greater technical expertise which can only be achieved by a highly competitive educational procedure (an aberration not eliminated by the comprehensive school system): children 'learn not *with* others and *for* others but against each *other* . . .'. Therefore, 'our schools are breeding grounds of alienated learning. The learning is not really the child's own learning. It sacrifices the child to the system and to his social function' (p. 22).

Finally, in North America education is also alienating, basically because of the increasingly large gap between theory and practice: 'the medium of the unjust society becomes the message which is indoctrinated into our hearts and minds. Our verbal allegiances to the principles of liberty and justice for all do not appear to affect substantially our daily lives' (p. 38).

The churches have also been involved in an alienating educational practice: in the Third World especially, by encouraging a 'prestigious'

standard unattainable by the majority of the population; by ignoring or rejecting indigenous culture (p. 8); by exalting the achievement-orientation of the Western work-ethic (p. 15); and finally, by using education to promote church-growth rather than using it to promote 'the life of God's people in the world, for their mission and their life of service' (p. 29). Churches, therefore, should abandon the structures of privilege inherent in their educational practice and challenge the whole notion of modern educational theory. In particular they should pioneer experiments in non-school-orientated education, 'identifying new areas of involvement among neglected sections of the community' (pp. 8, 31).

The new thrust in education advocated by the majority of these documents recalls Paolo Freire's celebrated educational practice, 'conscientisation' (cf. 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed'): 'we then discovered that the immediate need was not literacy but *the creation of a critical mind* in face of the communications media which they had in their homes' (p. 31, my italics).

Conscientisation will require a sustained educational effort to undermine the inhuman values of an educational system tied to the wholly pragmatic needs of the consumer-society. China, which has pioneered a practical and ethically-based education, is given as the model for education for an alternative society: 'As Mao would have it, learning is more than the acquisition of practical mental skills and a scientific intelligence; it also involves the cultivation of a moral consciousness, a *gemeinschaftlich* ethic of the Chinese human community. Only on this basis can politics and development be organised by and for the masses' (p. 46).

For those of us who believe that the Capitalist system is not only unjust in human terms and immoral in ecological terms but ultimately doomed to extinction, anyway, these documents present a wealth of exhilarating material. At the end of it all one nagging 'professional' question keeps cropping up: what ought to be the implications in the field of theological education of this call to a new thrust in education? Does this too 'sacrifice (the student) to the system and to his (ecclesiastical) function'?

Section V: Structures of injustice and struggles for liberation

AS far as the WCC executive élite are concerned this is the key section for the forthcoming Assembly: 'The topic of Section V of the WCC's Fifth Assembly has probably attracted more attention, in recent years, than any other item on the agenda'; 'the extracts which follow . . . point to some of the major questions for ecumenical consideration today, in relation to the main theme of the Assembly' (p. 31).

The purpose of the section is 'to examine patterns of domination'

against which various groups are struggling (for example, women, ethnic minorities, racially oppressed majorities, the poor and under-privileged) and 'to examine the extent to which national and international military-economic systems create and perpetuate this domination'. In the event, the second concern attracts most attention. The final part includes non-systematic 'theological reflections related to the concern for social justice and the struggle for liberation'.

The documents produce evidence, then, to show how the present world economic system is based on structures which inevitably maintain an unjust distribution of the world's wealth, 'a system weighted in favour of those who have the power and against those who seek to attain it' (p. 3). The structures are undergirded by 'the Western powers and the power élites of the developing nations' which 'form a military and economic alliance to preserve the status quo and to prevent wider participation in the fruits of development' (p. 8). They are operated by those two arch-demons of contemporary neo-Capitalism; the multi-national companies and the international production of armaments. This section carries two lengthy and serious exposés of the workings and vested interests of these two concerns (pp. 8-11 and 12-17) and shows, above all, how their internationalisation has given them sufficient flexibility to elude almost all control of their objectives and dealings. The second article, produced by the Max-Planck-Institute, Germany, persuasively demonstrates the disintegrating effects of these economic power complexes: 'free production zones are placed in developing countries as enclaves to allow the exploitation of the local labour force by foreign firms with a minimum of integration in the local national economy' (p. 15).

Just in case members of the Western, exploiting countries do not feel the force of the kind of analysis produced in these articles, showing the devastating effect of present economic power distribution on any real economic advance in what this dossier calls 'the Two-Thirds World', an examination, from England, of the plight of the migrant workers within Europe is also included (pp. 26-28). This document shows how trans-national migration to find employment, with all the attending disruptions of acculturation and family life, is 'a scandal due to anarchy in development and therefore investment'; a scandal to the advantage of the more powerful industrial complexes in Europe who gain cheap labour with very little responsibility in terms of contracts and social security. In general terms, the article also reveals who mainly benefit by the Common Market, namely the already rich: 'even today the regional disparities within the European Community are still as great as when it was founded' (p. 27). The plight of the Chicanos (Spanish-speaking migrant workers) in the USA provides an analogous situation; both show the stark realities of a shameless exploitation perpetuated upon 'Third World' communities within the heart of 'liberal-minded' Western civilisation.

Two of the documents (those produced by the French Protestant Federation and the Max-Planck Institute) interpret the situation in the Marxist categories of the class struggle (cf. pp. 5-6, 16), and urge, as a consequence, a revolutionary movement to eliminate the present structures of organised violence and injustice. Other documents, however, believe that substantial changes to the benefit of the world's oppressed majority will come about through persuasion and reform under present legal systems. The stance of these latter is 'utopian socialist' rather than Marxist socialist (cf. pp. 4, 27).

Throughout the section, but particularly in the final part, 'How does Christ set free?' certain theological justification is given for the church's active involvement in the contemporary struggles for liberation. The following quotes are fairly representative of the general theological trend: 'All Churches would affirm that concern for justice and liberation of the oppressed is central to the Gospel'; 'Christ sets us free to be signs and servants of his liberating purpose for all people'; 'as a partisan of the poor the Church is called to . . . solidarity with those who struggle to change unjust and oppressive structures' (p. 1); 'God has revealed himself as on the side of the powerless, not to endorse their powerlessness but to secure justice' (p. 2). From Black Theology comes the polemical statement that 'the main stream of theology in Europe and North America has not been about liberation, but about personal salvation and the rationalisation of oppression . . .' (p. 40). Then, finally, the churches themselves 'as symbolised by the largely marginal position of the majority of Church members women, laity and youth' (p. 2) are structures of injustice.

Other attempts at theologising on the subject of man's total liberation are either pariously weak or just plain stupid. I found particularly silly Nelle Morton's 'feminist' objection that 'there is no God-language free from sexist imagery' (p. 29). Instead of either bewailing the obvious fact that the Trinity is portrayed with the use of 'masculine pronouns and attributes' or withdrawing into feminist exodus communities 'during these wilderness days' (p. 30) (a rather bourgeois re-action), she might do well to reflect on the fact that women in the New Testament (especially in the Gospels) come out with a much stronger reputation than do men. Moreover, two contributions, in particular, from Orthodox theologians fail to relate to biblical standards of truth. The one by Georges Khodre (pp. 34-38) draws on the tradition of certain Greek Fathers to propound the doctrine of *apocatastasis*, the belief in *universal salvation*, through the grace-inspired fulfillment of the Christian virtues. But this doctrine, which Khodre admits 'has not been revealed biblically', leads to a *universal romanticism* and a *universal baptism* of human culture (p. 37). The one by Ireneos, Metropolitan of Germany (pp. 55-57), proposes a very old-fashioned and for these days, entirely naïve view of the Church's mission towards the State.

On the other hand, there is a reasonably well-balanced statement from the Central Committee of the WCC on the use of violence and non-violence in the pursuit of revolutionary aims. However, they admit, despite support given to guerilla groups, that 'non-violent action represents relatively unexplored territory'. Theologically speaking they could have pointed out more clearly that the advocates of violence and non-violence use an entirely different hermeneutical method in their approach to the testimony and authority of Jesus Christ (p. 47).

Finally, not enough emphasis has been given to the Third World rejection of all imperialisms. 'The radical rejection of technological and industrial progress' which the French Protestants think can be left to one side represents, in a modified form, not the Western middle-class nostalgia for the primitive but the rejection of the ideals of the consumer-society (as a cover up for loss of being (Paolo Freire) and a determination to forge a technology adapted to the genuine needs of different cultures and circumstances than those of the mercantile nations of the world's centre.

It is to be hoped that the discussion in Nairobi will convince the churches of the West that 'movements and struggles in the Third World cannot be fully understood in exclusively or even primarily Western terms' (p. 20). The Third World believes it has its own solutions to its own problems; it is tired, therefore, of having the paternalistic solutions of the Western world thrust upon it.

Section VI: Human development—The ambiguities of power, technology and quality of life

THE final section follows on closely from the preceding one. Its overall ideological position is the same, namely that the grinding poverty of two-thirds of the world's population is directly caused by what one of the reports calls 'the technological frivolity and over-production' of the Western world (p. 40). At the same time the extracts quoted try to engage with the more practical problems of development, the use of political and technological power and the relationship between economic growth, conservation of the environment and ethics.

The section, therefore, is concerned to place the discussion of the Fifth WCC Assembly within the context of the abject failure of 'the second development decade' (p. 1) to promote an overall higher standard of living for the majority of the Third World peoples: 'these shortages are not merely due to lack of production resulting from natural disasters and the population explosion. They are also due to the increase in consumption needs per person, not so much in the poor countries as in the rich countries, and even there not for people but

for cattle' (p. 31).

The failure is three-fold. Firstly, development has been too narrowly defined in terms of a nation's GNP. It has been assumed that when a nation's GNP has made a dramatic upward turn, as in the case of Brazil, then the nation concerned is developing satisfactorily. However, such a definition is based only on quantifiable economic data and ignores very specific moral issues such as: the redistribution of the wealth gained; the increasing self-reliance and self-determination of the peoples concerned; the use of money for social welfare projects rather than, for example, military spending, in a word 'criteria which affect the quality of life generated by societies' (pp. 11, 55). Secondly, development aid given to Third World nations has been linked to structures that could only prolong the gap between rich and poor and the dependence of the weak on the powerful: 'the very process of development tends to accentuate existing disparities and increase the power of the dominant group' (p. 17). The realities of the situation have led economists like Gunder Frank to speak of the 'development of underdevelopment' and of the world divided between the developed and 'underdeveloping' nations. Thirdly, the patterns of development imposed on the Third World have largely assumed the desirability of consumer-society values: 'World economic policy is still centred very largely around the problems of the powerful industrial nations . . .' (p. 1); 'the majority of Africans believe that . . . total cultural imitation of the West or East is the fastest and surest way to achieve national greatness' (p. 35).

The only way to break out of the vicious circle of the development of underdevelopment is through a technological revolution wholly applicable to the Third World. Such a technology would be primarily geared to only modest consumer consumption and the maintenance of full employment (p. 6), i.e. it would be based on labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive industry. In order for such a technological revolution to take place, Third World nations might have to 'turn inwards in order to develop their own quality of life' (p. 40) for 'this cultural, political and ideological subservience to the West or East creates a barrier to the adoption of distinctive methods and techniques which would lead Africa out of its backwardness, give it a vision of greatness, validate native talents and achievements and provide the strength of a nationalist ideology for continued modernisation' (p. 35). The argument, then, is for less interdependence, for this is really dependence, and a period of withdrawal analogous to that of China between 1949 and 1971. Patterns of development might be modelled on Tanzanian Ujamaa-Socialism (both an 'ideology for development and an ethic of distribution' (p. 51) for rural areas and smaller industrial units and 'cottage' industries for the urban areas.

One of the most fundamental questions before the Assembly will be: 'what can the Churches do to promote new internal structures of

economic and political co-operation for global justice?" (p. 2). These extracts suggest some answers.

Firstly, the churches need 'to become more aware of the growing disparities between the poor, dispossessed and powerless, and the accumulators of wealth and power' (p. 15). No doubt they will be urged to endorse central WCC policy decisions based on the conviction that 'the Christian imperative' is to transform 'established power-structures in societies and between societies in favour of the poor, the oppressed and the weaker sections of people . . .' (M. M. Thomas, p. 25).

Secondly, from the process of conscientisation should arise a more conscious and well-defined theological reflection on the great modern issues of structural justice, power (cf. pp. 21-23), 'national revolutionary models' which are not 'the mere copy or importation of ideological schemes' (p. 28), the use and conservation of natural resources (cf. pp. 37-40) and the relationship between new scientific advances and worthy human goals. A tentative beginning to this reflection has begun in Latin America around the concept of the 'new man'. We quote a passage from the 'Manifesto to the Nation' of the Methodist Evangelical Church in Bolivia, which shows the direction in which further theological thought might go by inter-relating the unique concerns of the Gospel with the pressing challenge of the present obscene structures of economic, political and cultural dependence of the Third World peoples:

The liberation of man will not be done unless he is previously liberated from his alienation, his complexes, his admiration for his oppressor and his imitation of foreign ways. Our best contribution to Bolivia as a Christian Church is to participate in the formation of the new Bolivian man, truly humanised by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In our evangelical Churches we have tried to form a moral man, irreproachable in his conduct, free from vices, turned into a useful element in society, honest, hard-working, a good parent. But the Christian man is much more than the prototype of sobriety. He is a free man, without alienations, conscious of his possibilities and of his responsibility to take his destiny into his own hands. He is an intense man 'hungry and thirsty for righteousness', who, like his Master, 'has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life in ransom for many'. He is a reconciled man, and a man who reconciles, who has received the ministry of reconciliation among men from Him who on a Cross 'was reconciling the world to Himself'. Finally, he is the man who has been born to hope, who rejects resignations as a false virtue and fights against every unjust structure which tends to make of man, a man without a future, one-dimensional and without hope . . . (p. 29).

Conclusions

THESE documents, as is their intention, suggest various lines of thought for a continuing reflection within the Church. Each one is connected in some way to the basic contemporary hermeneutical question: how should theory and practice be related together within the context of the Christian faith?

The question is posed most succinctly in the article on Black Theology: 'If the Gospel is pre-eminently the news of liberation from oppression, then the business of doing theology, as far as black people are concerned, must begin with the black condition as the point of reflection' (Section V, p. 40). On the whole the documents assume the theological method pioneered latterly by the Theology of Liberation and Black Theology, that the hermeneutical question must be approached initially from the side of the church's actual commitment to a liberating praxis.

Such a *praxis*, in order to be both relevant and efficacious, depends upon a correct analysis of the structures of domination and dependence operative in the modern world. That is why the dossiers carry such a weight of material dedicated to the discernment of the major causes of the present world crisis: the threats of technology; élitist educational programmes; neo-capitalism as the cause rather than the cure of underdevelopment; the wilful blindness and selfishness of the established consumer-societies based on the fetishism of material ownership, etc. etc.

But the point at issue, to echo Karl Marx, is not to analyse the causes but to change the system; it is to commit the church to fulfill its liberating mission. This is the crucial question before the Assembly: how to commit the church to liberation when it has, in fact, yet to rid itself of its centuries-old unconscious tendency to neutralise the forces of freedom within its midst. But a second question is equally important: to what liberating praxis should the church be committed? Both questions demand serious theological reflection in the light of the analysis of dependence and alienation given in the dossiers. Unfortunately, it is precisely serious theological reflection which is the ingredient missing from the preparatory documents: to adapt Lenin's famous dictum, the revolutionary *praxis* suggested is unaccompanied by a serious revolutionary theological theory.

There are, of course, intermittent attempts to produce an ordered theological discourse as both motivation and justification for a liberation praxis, but they are desperately inadequate. Perhaps one should not expect too much from limited selections of material. But, then, why should the selections made almost uniformly represent the universalistic, utopian and romantic strain in contemporary ecumenical (not necessarily connected to the WCC) theology?

The following areas show where the main weaknesses lie:

1. There is a recurrent confusion made between the biblical doctrines of creation and salvation which logically leads to theological monism and universalism. (See further the article by N. T. Wright.)
2. 'Incarnational' theology is an inadequate basis for the church's mission of liberation. Jesus Christ did not come into the world merely to identify himself with oppressed humanity but to substitute his perfect life for the sin of both oppressed and oppressor. The cross, therefore, is not just inspirational (*imitatio Christi*) but the accomplishment of a wholly unique salvation.
3. Salvation is effective not only prospectively (salvation for) but also retrospectively (salvation from). It is not only 'newness of life—the unfolding of true humanity in the fulness of God' (Section V, p. 31) but also liberation from the wrath of God revealed against 'all idolatry and injustice of men who by their injustice suppress the truth'.
4. Man's real alienation, therefore, is the result neither of a personal commitment to selfishness nor of supra-personal structures of oppression, however much these may be the tragic results of the reality of lostness, but of an ontological desire to be as God, the supreme being and the master of his fate.
5. No real attempt has been made to forge adequate links between a biblical view of truth and ethical decision demanded by the realities analysed in each section.

Each of these areas represent unfinished hermeneutical tasks for the church whilst actually engaged in the fulfillment of its sundry divine commissions. It is quite fascinating to see the way in which the traditional emphasis of the WCC on the unity of the churches has largely given way to a concern about justice and liberation within humanity as a whole. The step is largely to be commended. However, it has not yet been matched (as far as these dossiers are concerned) by a repudiation of the romanticism of relativistic theology in favour of the theology of biblical realism. Many Christians will be eagerly awaiting signs from the Fifth Assembly of some move towards this latter.