

RELIGION & DEMOCRACY

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What Spirit Comes When the WCC Calls?

Gulf War Displaces Other Issues from Assembly's Political Menu

By Lawrence E. Adams

Liberation theologies ... re-read the Bible and re-interpret Christian tradition and theology from their experience of oppression and liberation. [But] This must be the time we have to re-read the Bible from the perspective of birds, water, air, trees and mountains, the most wretched of the earth in our time. Learning to think like a mountain, changing our centre from human beings to all living beings, has become our 'responsibility' in order to survive. -- Prof. Chung Kyung-Hyung.

Professor Chung, a Korean Presbyterian educator, called for this theological development in her keynote address on theme of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC): "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation." Accompanied by a troupe of dancers with gongs, drums and banners, and Australian aborigines in paint and loincloths, she invoked ancestor spirits and indicated that the best "image of the Holy Spirit comes from the image of *Kwan In*... [who] is venerated as Goddess of compassion and wisdom in East Asian women's popular religion." Her demand that theology -- and politics and social life -- cease to be "anthropocentric" and become "life-centric" proposed a shift from liberation theology to earth theology. This raised many eyebrows and some protest, but also earned her a standing ovation.

World Council of Churches assemblies, held every seven years, are always occasions to survey the trends within and the forces at work on the Church. Assemblies decide little, but they are taken as milestone events, reference points, for organized "ecumenism."



WCC Photo by Peter Williams

At events such as the the WCC's February Assembly in Canberra, Australia, little often is decided. But the experience is the best signal of trends at work in the ecumenical world until the next gathering in 1998.

The WCC -- constitutively a "fellowship of churches from every part of the world, which confesses the common calling of the churches to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" -- also displayed at its Seventh Assembly its own internal contradictions. The Assembly both heard "progressive" theologians advance new formulations of the gospel, and felt the strength of Orthodoxy and evangelical Protestantism in asserting biblical doctrines. Participants worshipped according to ancient confessional liturgies and in sessions which seemed to call for adoration of earth-bound "spirits" and even the earth itself. They were welcomed to the "sacred land" of Australia by aboriginal dancers, and at one point were "purified" by "sacred fire" so they could be acceptable to the land.

The Seventh Assembly also demonstrated that the WCC is about power. It has no authority in the life
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of the church, but it does have influence. In the words of one senior WCC staffer, "The WCC does not speak for the churches, it speaks to the churches." The competition was heavy for control of that message. Long-time divisions in WCC ranks threatened to break up the Assembly as governing bodies were elected and priorities set. Many participants had hoped this assembly would effect the unveiling of a "new, comprehensive ecumenical theology" built upon creation consciousness and a broadly-defined work of the Spirit, but the effort ran headlong into established political and theological commitments. Even the widely supported cause of church unity, which scored some advances, faced the competing claims of regional, gender and confessional blocs.

At a press conference on the opening day of the Assembly, General Secretary Emilio Castro attempted to sum up his goals for the meeting by first repudiating the notion that it would major on global crises. "The WCC is not the UN at prayer," he asserted. But, he said, the church must respond to new situations, which includes the end of the cold war and other global shifts, as the WCC discerns and defines its purposes. Castro set three priorities: (1) examination of the relationship of the church with "other spiritualities;" 2) search for alternative models of society, since socialism has collapsed and the West is bankrupt; 3) progress toward visible church unity.

Invaded by Iraq

Contrary to Castro's intentions, most of the early attention was on the war in the Persian Gulf -- which was at its height in mid-February as the Assembly met. The opening worship and every sermon, speech and statement included an obligatory anti-war statement.

Early exponents included a Lebanese Orthodox Archbishop, Aram Keshishian, who said the Gulf war was the beginning of World War III and would lead to major outbreaks of violence and reaction in the region. He was the first to use the oft-repeated phrase: "This is neither a holy nor a just war, and cannot be." U.S. Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning

echoed Keshishian, and went on to declare the just war tradition dead: "If Augustine and Aquinas were alive now, and had to contend with the smart bomb, they would be pacifists," according to Browning.

One presentation by American radical evangelical Jim Wallis of *Sojourners*, in Canberra as an official WCC adviser, cast most blame for the war on the "failed political and moral character" of the United



Prof. Chung, who was accused of syncretism by orthodox participants at the Assembly, burns the names of dead victims to give their spirits release.

WCC Photo by Peter Williams

States. The Assembly atmosphere did not welcome other points of view, a perception reinforced by a required "peace march" through the streets of Canberra led by a group of children bearing a large globe. The march ended with Assembly participants at worship tent where they engaged in "worship on [sic] justice, peace and the integrity of creation" that had the characteristics of a mass meeting. "Worshippers" were required to recite their resistance to various social evils and commit to active measures.

Some did dare to offer other viewpoints, and were remarkable for it. The British delegation, including the newly elected Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, stood firmly, insisting that a cease-fire call must recognize that Iraq was the initial aggressor and must demand Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and adherence to UN resolutions.

In contrast to their British brethren, church leaders from the United States, led by National Council of Churches' president Leonid Kishkovsky, NCC General Secretary Joan Campbell, United Methodist Bishop Melvin Talbert, and advised by Jim Wallis, used the occasion to release a "Call to the Churches," which described their opposition from the beginning to the allied military response to Iraq's invasion. U.S. church leaders were quite intent on receiving in Canberra the recognition and support for their positions which had been denied them at home. Episcopal Bishop Browning indicated he was certain the 80 percent polling support for the war in the United States amounted only to sentiment for the troops and not support for the policy.

The debate on the final statement on the war --

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religion & economics

Quarterly

report & reflection
on economic
development that
strengthens
democratic
societies

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Symposium on the World Economy after the Cold War:

Uncertain Times Ahead for First, Second, Third Worlds

In the Winter 1991 issue of Religion & Economics Quarterly, IRD Economics Associate Fredrick Jones described current tensions in the international economy between free-trade ideals and threatened domestic interests. This has complicated the process of international negotiation based on the post-World War II system. Jones suggested that "the advanced industrial states seem to have lost the will or capacity to sacrifice for the international common good." A variety of voices in the Christian community were asked to reflect on the current state of affairs, the meaning of the "common good," and the broad understanding of how politics and economics relate to the building of international institutions.

The following are excerpts from some of the responses, which appear in full in "The World Economy after the Cold War -- A Symposium," a briefing paper now available from IRD for \$4.

Relating Communities

Kurt C. Schaefer

The GATT, or General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, is the institution through which trade in the Free World has gradually, since the end of World War II, been liberated from national, political restrictions. It currently covers about two-thirds of world trade, excluding agriculture, textiles, services, some investments,

and intellectual property. The "Uruguay Round" of trade liberalization talks, aimed at expanding the GATT's authority, had broken down ... [in December] when the Europeans objected to reductions in their trade barriers and agricultural subsidies.

...The historical process of revising and extending the GATT as the world economy changes and matures therefore appears to be at an impasse. The best-case scenario would probably see the administration convincing Congress to grant an extension of its trade negotiation powers. This would probably be more palatable if the administration takes steps through non-GATT institutions to head-off "protectionist fever," such as improving the institutions that prosecute industry claims of unfair trade practices, stiffening copyright and patent infringement enforcement, countering foreign export subsidies, and justifying hope in progress at the Uruguay Round.

Our international trading system therefore faces a sad irony. The Eastern [European] economies seek liberal trade, but cannot construct it on the accumulated refuse of 45 years of politicized trade; the Western economies seem unable to appreciate and retain the benefits of liberal trade without a recent catastrophe (like a world war) to remind them of trade's importance.

Christian reflection could help provide a framework for formulating a new vision of the common good upon which to revise our trade institutions. I think Christians would do well to reconsider our old conception of the Polity as a

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Community of Communities. Each "community" (or "sphere" or "institution") bears a created "internal order" that influences how it should function within its "office," and how it should relate to the other "communities." The secular debate still swings too much between the poles of Liberal Individualism and State Collectivization; the middle ground, which the world seeks, is a turf that has been the subject of much Christian thinking in the past.

Kurt C. Schaefer is Assistant Professor at Economics at Calvin College.

Conflict on the Horizon

James W. Skillen

The world is now moving beyond the contest in which institutions such as NATO and GATT had their original meaning and purpose. The future cannot yet be envisioned, so these institutions will both persist for a while and become more and more of a question. I expect, then, that the emerging era will be defined more by conflict and experiment than by any adequate strategic planning. World leaders will not be able to imagine or to create new international institutions without assessing the failures and successes of old ones. Thus, the next decade will be dominated by more rather than less international economic conflict, and by the collapse and failure of more rather than fewer international economic agreements. Blocs will form in Europe, North America, and in the Pacific around Japan. Cooperation among the big three economic regions will be ad hoc and episodic, with the Third World winning and losing by happenstance while having relatively little voice in the decisions that determine international economic relations.

Perhaps a very critical economic or military situation, such as a global depression or continuing explosiveness in the Middle East, will force leaders of

the most powerful nations to create some new and better international institutions. But until that time, I don't expect to see much firm or enduring agreement about what constitutes the common good of the international economy.

James W. Skillen is the Executive Director of the Center for Public Justice.

Recovering Public Virtue

Kenneth Craycraft

International economic and political debate has been distorted these past 70 odd years. If the only options are Marxism and liberal democracy (with its partner capitalism), the choice is clear: the latter is morally, politically and economically superior. But by being forced to argue the competing claims of these two types of regimes, western liberalism has not been subject to the scrutiny it properly deserves. During the cold war, to criticize liberal democracy was to be associated -- whether justly or not -- with defenders of communism.

But now that Locke has officially won the modern war of political theory, it is time to subject him to a more rigorous examination. Specifically, the post-cold war economy has to re-think the idea of rights In the American context we often debate positive versus negative rights. While advocates of each think they are arguing fundamentally different positions, an examination of their origins demonstrates that the political theory behind both negative and positive rights is the same: man is naturally autonomous, and each individual possesses natural claims (rights) against every other individual.

While each man's pursuit of his individual right has worked fairly well in the North American context, we have to ask how much of that success has been at the expense of capital from pre-modern political theory. Already

we see a major breakdown in reasoned political discourse and public and private morality. Such decay is deadly for any regime, but it seems endemic to a democratic rights-based one. And even if pursuit of political and economic rights works tolerably well on the individual level, Jones' article is implicit acknowledgment that it does not translate very well into international economies.

Kenneth Craycraft is a Research Associate at the American Enterprise Institute.

A Role for Religious Groups

Donna K. Dial

New and emerging economies may not be responsive to the traditionally accepted methods and devices which have succeeded in industrialized nations. Consequently, individuals who have internalized many of ... [these] attributes have a special charge to assist in the transition. We must find creative ways to aid individuals and communities to address ... educational needs and to identify their positions of economic power in local, national and international economies.

Furthermore, if we believe individuals and governments are responsible to humankind and to the environment, we must accept the responsibility required by good stewardship of our global resources -- both natural and human. The role of religious groups may be significant in this process: Assistance in the conceptualization and articulation of common good; stewardship advocacy for resource utilization and environmental protection; and, provision of educational resources, with sensitivity, to the individuals whom they serve. Religious groups may, therefore, be critical agents of change during this decade of political and economic transition.

Donna K. Dial is the President of Economic Education for Clergy.

Collaborating Injustices

Herbert Schlossberg

Jones knows that all governments intervene in their economies, but he doesn't question the wisdom of this fact. Indeed he admires the proficiency of those governments which are good at it, and seems to be rueful of the fact that his own is not among them. He doesn't touch at all on the reason why interventionist policies are attractive to politicians, and assumes they are acting in the national interest.

But if we look at actual cases of the most common sort of intervention -- trade protection -- we begin to see a different picture than the earnest politicians of mythology trying to advance the national economy. We see rather this one doing favors for the tobacco farmer and processor in his district; another for the steel producer and the associated union official; another for the citrus grower; another for the semi-conductor manufacturer. In poor countries whole rural economies have been destroyed by cheap food policies designed to help politicians maintain their urban bases of support. Western governments, which prefer to enrich farmers at the expense of other citizens, inflame those situations by providing enough food to shield the recipient governments from the consequences of their folly. This is a collaboration of injustices, with the respective political forces favoring their own constituencies, for which they are suitably rewarded at the expense of other citizens.

Herbert Schlossberg is an author and editor, and a contributor to the Villars Committee on Relief and Development.

Help for the Reformers

Robert Benne

It will be a terrible irony if countries newly convinced of this [export-led

growth] strategy will find their access to developed markets closed because of rising economic nationalism or regional protectionism. It seems to me that Christian concern should lead us to a special effort to remain open to their goods and services.

Further, at a time where "fairness" may be put on the back-burner, or simply used as a cloak for economic nationalism, Christians should push for compensatory strategies to help those economies get off the ground, i.e., to find the ways that they can enter the world economy in fruitful ways. This will not be a popular cause since it is a difficult one -- many of those economies will not be able to stand on their own feet immediately. It will take great ingenuity and perhaps significant economic support to get them to the point of self-sufficiency.

This will be a continuing obligation for Christians and other persons of good will as we struggle for an international economic common good.

Robert Benne is the chairman of the department of Philosophy and Religion at Roanoke College.

A Need for Cooperation

Gerald W. Brock

Solomon established extensive trade with Phoenicia ... and used his partnership with Phoenicia to increase his technological skills While Solomon's trading enterprise presumably increased the prosperity of the entire region, Israel clearly was well compensated for its role as policeman of the trading economy: Solomon received "revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings." (I Kings 10:15) With the division of the kingdom and intermittent civil war after Solomon's death, the prosperous trading economy disintegrated and trade once again became a dangerous and expensive undertaking.

The essential outline of the Solomon story (military power leading

to trading prosperity followed by decline when the military power is no longer adequate to control the trade routes) has been repeated many times. The Roman Empire established a vast trading system that disintegrated with a great loss of economic welfare when the military power of Rome declined. The great free trade era of 1815-1914 was made possible by British domination of the world's oceans. During the later part of that period, Britain's economic power was declining relative to the rapidly growing U.S. and German economies. The U.S. was content to fit into the British-dominated trade system, but Germany was not and thus the free trade prosperity ended when Britain could no longer enforce its control.

The post-war trading system has been dominated by the U.S. through a combination of economic and military power. Just as the early nineteenth century U.S. protective tariffs posed no threat to the British-dominated free trade system, so the protective policies of Japan and other countries were no threat to U.S.-dominated system in the early postwar era. As the U.S. dominance of the world economy has been reduced, differences between the U.S. practices and the practices in other countries have become sources of trade friction. The problem for the world economy is to find a graceful and peaceful way to make the transition from a U.S.-dominated economy to one in which several countries play major cooperative roles. The cooperative U.S.-British relationship at the beginning of this century is a hopeful model, but it will take a disciplined effort to put mutual economic advantage ahead of jingoistic nationalism and find an appropriate method of cooperation among the major nations.

Gerald W. Brock is a Visiting Professor of Telecommunications at the George Washington University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

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Return to Christian Culture

E. Calvin Beisner

It is no accident that the man who wrote *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* was initially educated for the Presbyterian clergy under Francis Hutcheson; was influenced through him and Samuel Pufendorf by the writings of both John Calvin and the Salamanca school; was first and foremost a professor of moral, not political, philosophy; and developed his analysis of economic relations as an outworking of his decidedly Christian and liberal (in the old sense of the word) moral system set forth seventeen years earlier in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Far from advocating selfishness (as some of his ill-informed critics today assert) and just as far from promoting Benthamite utilitarianism (as some of his counterfeit allies today assert), Adam Smith founded his thinking on what he believed were objective, universal moral principles revealed by God in both creation and Scripture, of which three -- justice, prudence, and beneficence -- were preeminent. Of these three, Smith placed beneficence at the pinnacle of personal, and justice at the pinnacle of political, moral conduct. And the highest expression of the highest virtue, beneficence, Smith said was self-sacrifice in the service of others

Of these things Smith could write with confidence. Why? Because, whether Christ ruled in every heart or not, Christian theology and the Christian ethic dominated his culture. His words were pregnant with meaning that is lost on the secularized, pluralized, relativized graduates of twentieth-century British and American miseducation. The loss of this theological and moral foundation sets moderns adrift on a cacophonous sea of competing claims about economic order, human rights, and human

liberties, a cacophony in which every boast is as good as another and the only standard of discrimination (I use the word advisedly) is nondiscrimination. That way lies cognitive and cultural suicide.

E. Calvin Beisner writes and lectures on the application of Biblical theology and ethics to economics and public policy.

Stewardship of the Planet

Todd Steen

It must be made clear from the outset that one solution that is not acceptable is to ask emerging nations to be more environmentally conscious while the more "advanced" nations continue to consume the earth's "environmental capital" at an increasing rate. First, this approach will not solve but only exacerbate our planet's environmental problems. Second and more importantly, this "solution" lacks any element of the justice that should be a foundation of relationships in the international community. We need to acknowledge both the fact of scarce planetary resources (including both natural resources and the pollution "carrying capacity" of the earth) as well as our responsibility for the stewardship of these resources.

How then can we make "environmental room" for this next wave of newly exporting nations? First of all, and perhaps most simply for us, Western nations must take serious and rapid steps to reduce the amount of environmental damage done from our consumptive lifestyles. Without this step we will take no leadership role in the stewardship of the planet, and the developing nations will see little reason to adjust while we continue to claim the lion's share of the pollution "carrying capacity" of the earth. If the richer nations continue to claim the environment at their present rate, we will give the developing nations even more reason to see us as the cause of

their relatively inferior economic state.

Todd Steen is Assistant Professor of Economics at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

Briefs

Free copies of the *Stewardship Journal*, a new publication of the Villars Committee on Relief and Development, are available from the IRD's Economics Studies Program. The *Journal* explores topics ranging from wealth and poverty to the environment.

Michael Novak's *This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas*, has been published by the American Enterprise Institute. The work extends Novak's efforts to develop moral underpinnings for free market economic activity, with an emphasis on the progress Latin America has made in moving away from mercantilistic structures.

Two briefing papers, *Other Voices: Economic Alternatives in Latin America*, by Amy Sherman, which documents the emergence of new approaches to development in Latin America, and *The Church and Democracy in Eastern Europe*, by Dana Preusch, an analysis of the Church's contribution to communism's demise, are available from the IRD for \$4 each.

An noteworthy symposium commenced in the January 16, 1991, issue of *The Christian Century* with Max L. Stackhouse and Dennis P. McCann's article entitled "A Postcommunist Manifesto." The authors speak not only to the failure of communism but also question the ability of the socialist model to provide a framework for a viable "postcommunist" political economy. The following issue contained a series of rebuttals.

Vietnam Detains 'Threats' to Regime

By Stan De Boe

The Vietnamese constitution allows for freedom of religion. That's small comfort to Christians (and Buddhists) who are considered a threat to the regime.

In the wake the heavy Christian contribution to the recent downfall of many Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, it is no surprise that Christians were persecuted during a crackdown in Vietnam between April and September of last year. One lasting result is that preachers are required to submit their sermons for approval and there is monitoring by officials to prevent criticism of government policies.

The crimes of believers are not defined in religious terms. Christians have been arrested, tried and sentenced in Vietnam for "criticizing the socialist system," "fomenting unrest," "possessing and

disseminating counterrevolutionary propaganda," or "terrorizing." Upon release, many detainees are not allowed to return to their ministries and become financially dependent on their families.

Some prisoners have little hope of ever being released. One such case, listed by Amnesty International, is Father Dominic Tran Dinh Thu, an 84-year-old Roman



Father Dominic Tran
Dinh Thu

Catholic priest. Arrested in 1987, Father Dominic was found guilty of all of the crimes noted above, and was sentenced to life imprisonment. As evidence of his opposition to the socialist regime, prosecutors cited his possession of materials such as "Open Wide the Door to Christ," "To Live a Totally Consecrated Life," and a prayer book.

A September 1988 appeal resulted only in a reduction of Father Dominic's sentence -- down to 20 years plus five years of probation before "citizens rights" would be restored. He remains in solitary confinement, gets two meals a day, and is denied

permission to write or receive letters or to read books. One monthly family visit is allowed. He is said to be in failing health, in part due to prison conditions.

Christianity, which has struggled for survival in Vietnam, is considered by authorities as a vestige of the colonial era. Contact with outside religious bodies has been condemned because it is a threat to expose people to the dangerous influence of foreign powers.

Since last September, restrictions on outside contact have eased somewhat. A delegation from the Vatican met with church and government officials, and Vietnamese Catholic bishops traveled to Rome for meetings with the pope. Recently, the government announced that it will allow Protestant church leaders in Hanoi to import 10,000 Bibles and hymnals -- the first since 1977.

Before last year's crackdown, many Christian communities were growing and no longer afraid to worship openly. Years of government repression, however, have left their mark. The Catholic bishop of Xuan Loc summed up the current conditions: five dioceses have no bishop; there are virtually no priests in the north and decreasing numbers in the south; the numbers of candidates to the seminary are limited; the government refuses to allow any ordinations; and there is a general lack of religious education. According to *Catholic International*, the bishop reported to the pope that "Christians, even with the best intentions ... cannot deepen their knowledge of Catholic doctrine which is, moreover, proving to be essential for Christian life today."

The Protestant church in Vietnam is divided. In the north it is very small and is virtually controlled by the Communist Party. It had sought unification with southern Protestants as the United Evangelical Church, but so far the northerners have been refused. Growth has continued in the south because of dedicated pastors and evangelists. This has not gone unchallenged; the government has closed several churches and imprisoned several evangelists -- again, not formally on religious grounds, but because they are said to violate state security.

**Taking
Action:**

Father Dominic and others remain imprisoned by the Vietnamese government. Protests of their continued detentions may be made by letter to the Vietnamese Ambassador to the United Nations. Address letters to: The Honorable Trinh Uan Lang, Ambassador of Vietnam to the United Nations, 20 Waterside Plaza, New York, NY 10010. Names of other captive clergy, Protestant and Catholic, are available from the IRD office.

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which took nearly all the time allotted for discussion of public issues -- saw the Assembly hastily adopt a pacifist position. This would have amounted to a repudiation of the Christian moral tradition which justifies the use of force in some "last resort" circumstances. But cooler heads prevailed. Some WCC leaders indicated they could not support a statement that discarded centuries of moral teaching so casually. The Assembly therefore reconsidered and removed the pacifist passage.

The final statement called for an immediate cease-fire, for Iraq to "show its intention" to withdraw from Kuwait, for a return to sanctions as the primary policy, and for the United Nations to take over dealing with the conflict.

Other issues on the agenda -- South Africa, the Baltics, intra-



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Address Correction Requested

Soviet conflicts, indigenous peoples, El Salvador -- were deferred to the Central Committee for action after time ran out. It is ironic that the Gulf war, which attracted so much of the WCC's attention, was effectively over by the time delegates got home. It is worth noting that matters dear to some participants -- such as inter-religious conflict in the Soviet Union and elsewhere -- were shoved aside by the war emphasis.

Religious Liberty and Democracy?

The WCC did seem to learn some things from recent world events: that "the limits to bureaucratic control have become clearly visible" and that freedom is a universal human impulse. The experience of being challenged by Bishop Laszlo Tokes of Romania for past silence in the face of oppression was sobering. But even with the presence of Tokes and other Eastern Europeans, attention to concerns for religious liberty was minimal. For example, the China Christian Council, successor to the official Three-Self Movement, was welcomed into the WCC without reference to continued restrictions on Chinese Catholics and other

non-recognized churches.

The lessons of recent history, and the persistence of sin and disorder, still seem not to have influenced the WCC toward some sense of reservation or caution regarding grand world order schemes. Perhaps the WCC demonstrated that its "lack of a vital, coherent ecumenical theology," which would provide a firmer basis for its ethical pronouncements, is indeed a critical problem. Never heard in Canberra: "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek for the city which is to come."

The Assembly, after all was said and done, ended with vague and ambiguous documents and appeals for further studies. Its reports have something for everyone, as is typical of consensus documents; any emphasis or orientation can find some support in the Assembly's deliberations and recommendations. The direction the WCC will take in the next few years is still an unanswered, but troubling question after Canberra.

Part II of Adams' report on the WCC Assembly, which focuses on theology and the new environmental movement, will appear next month.