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The World Council of Churches

By GILBERT A. THIELE

ED. NOTE.—This article reproduces a portion of a dissertation prepared for the theological faculty at the University of Basel, Switzerland, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of theology. The thesis was accepted on November 15, 1954, and bears the title: "The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America and Its Relations to the Ecumenical Movement in the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council." This part of the dissertation presents a brief history of the origin and development of the World Council of Churches. A basic bibliography for the study of the World Council of Churches is appended to the article.

THE World Council of Churches represents the confluence of previous ecumenical movements. The two most important streams of activity that merged in this broader and deeper endeavor are the Faith and Order Movement (Conference) and the Life and Work Conference. Each of these deserves our attention.

FAITH AND ORDER MOVEMENT (CONFERENCE) 1910—1948

The World Conference on Faith and Order grew out of the world missionary conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910. Here the conviction became dominant that the division of the world's churches, transplanted to the world's mission fields, was disastrous to the propagation of the Gospel. Perhaps without fully realizing what a Pandora's box of problems they were opening in the attempt to understand and remove the differences existing among the parent churches and thereby among the young churches, the mission leaders of this group planned a world conference on problems of the Christian faith and ecclesiastical order. This action came largely as the result of the leadership of Bishop Charles Brent, then (1910) Protestant Episcopal Bishop in the Philippine Islands, later (1918) of the same denomination's diocese of Western New York, and with the help of the dedicated secretarial work of Robert Gardiner, an Episcopal layman from Boston. A preliminary meeting of pastors, bishops, theologians, and church members, postponed because of World War I, was finally held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1920. The efforts of the men at this meeting and those of a series of continuation meetings laid the

groundwork for the first World Conference on Faith and Order. It was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in the Reformed Cathedral Church and in the university, August 3—21, 1927. While the initiative for Lausanne came largely from the American Protestant Episcopal Church, the Congregational Church in the U. S. A., the Disciples of Christ of our country, and an encyclical from the Ecumenical Patriarch, it was attended by 394 official delegates and observers from 108 churches in nine denominations on four continents. Studies on the following seven questions had been prepared: The Call to Unity, the Gospel, the Nature of the Church, Her Common Confession of Faith, the Ministry, the Sacraments, the Unity of Christendom and the Place of the Different Churches in It. These studies formed the basis of the reports that were received or adopted by the assembly.

As the commemorative plaque in the Lausanne cathedral proclaims to the visitor, Lausanne was the first serious attempt to organize and stimulate thinking on the similarities in the churches and to open the minds to the separating differences. When one reads either Dr. Herman Sasse's German or Canon H. N. Bate's English condensed report on Lausanne (see bibliography) or the account of this conference in the recent *History of the Ecumenical Movement*, one is at first struck by the seemingly careless manner in which some speakers glossed over the essentials of the Christians' faith in order to obviate the difficulties arising from the differences in the formulation and expression of that faith by the various churches. In evaluating this apparently superficial treatment of the differences and the apparent overemphasis of the likenesses in the churches, it must not be forgotten that Lausanne was a convention of gropers in a new land of Christian endeavor. It was beset by the twin fear of accomplishing nothing or of achieving too much in the attempt of getting together without as yet understanding one another. As a contribution to the ecumenical movement Lausanne brought strangers into conversation, contact, and prayerful worship, as well as reverent attention to one another. It initiated a movement which emphasized the necessity of listening to others and of weighing what they say and believe and thus contributed to the conviction that Christian conversation, if carried on earnestly and with the purpose not only of convincing but also

of understanding the other person, will result in progress toward agreement and in a tolerance that neither denies differences nor surrenders personal convictions.

A decade elapsed before the second World Conference on Faith and Order was held in Edinburgh in 1937. During the intervening years a continuation committee with a permanent secretarial staff carried on the work of bringing difference and likeness in the churches into a broad perspective. Bishop Brent served as chairman; Principal Garvie, as vice-chairman; George Zabriskie, as treasurer; and Ralph W. Brown, as general secretary. William Temple, bishop of Manchester, later Archbishop of York, and still later Archbishop of Canterbury, succeeded Bishop Brent († 1929) as chairman. A flood of responses to the Lausanne resolutions was collated. Written by a group of sixteen theologians from all major confessions, an important study on the Biblical and historical doctrine of grace appeared in 1932. Study groups on Faith and Order problems were initiated in nine countries and brought together members of all churches. Shortly before the Edinburgh Conference a volume entitled *The Ministry and the Sacraments* appeared. It served as a preparation for the coming conference and as an indication of the studies that would occupy the time of Faith and Order for years to come. Perhaps the most significant development during this decade between Lausanne and Edinburgh was the growing realization that Faith and Order would have to merge with Life and Work. In this way an inevitable duplication of effort could be avoided. Moreover, in a combined movement all phases of ecumenical interest would be promoted: Faith and Order would concern itself with the theological basis of unity; Life and Work, with the practical working out of the existing and hoped-for unity. Plans were already being formed to combine the two conferences into one World Council of Churches as soon as possible.

The conference at Edinburgh in 1937 could and did build on the foundation of Lausanne. The results were far more solid discussions and far greater readiness to join forces in work. The study of difference and likeness in doctrine and government went on unabated, even more intensely than before. As sharply as the

speakers stated their differences, so earnestly did they seek to discover their similarities and thus endeavor to draw nearer to unity. William Temple "held the reins," but the team of workers, scholars, and representative specialists turned out a prodigious amount of work in reviewing the pre-Edinburgh documents and came up with statements less vague, more pointed, and possibly more New Testamental than the well-meant but much too broad generalizations of Lausanne.

Five sections used the all too brief time of sixteen days to study the following topics: The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ; The Church of Christ and the Word of God; The Church of Christ; The Ministry and Sacraments; The Church's Unity in Life and Worship; The Communion of Saints.

If what Prof. Donald Baillie of St. Andrew's said about the report on "The Ministry and Sacraments" was true of that document, it was certainly true also of the other subjects discussed at Edinburgh. He remarked: "This report (submitted by Commission III) is far ahead of anything the churches are likely to have reached at present. Is not this the value of these ecumenical gatherings? We have come to discover our nearness to one another and agreements have been reached, not by compromise, but by genuine rapprochement, which could not have come about otherwise. It may not be in a day or a year, but however slow the progress and however distant the goal, something is here happening which is most significant."¹

In the discussions it became evident, as the Archbishop of York declared (*FO*, pp. 62 ff.) and as Father Boulgakoff substantiated (*FO*, p. 67), that the point where agreement was most needed and therefore a meeting of minds and hearts was most to be sought, was in the doctrine of the church, in ecclesiology. But also there the various points of view became clearer in the course of the discussions with those who held differing beliefs, and a measure of understanding emerged.

A great degree of unanimity was achieved in the report of the commission on "The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ." "When the whole conference assembled and received the report of Section I,

¹ *History of the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 433. *Faith and Order*, Edinburgh, ed. L. Hodgson, p. 136, henceforth cited as *FO*.

'The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ,' it was an immense encouragement to all, and in a very special way to the continental churches, that they found the report, as presented to them, prefaced with the statement that, "There is in connection with this subject no ground for maintaining division between the Churches'" (FO, pp. 224, 312, 344). Anyone reading the book *The Doctrine of Grace*, and the report, as given three times in the Edinburgh Report, edited by Canon Hodgson, will probably concede that the unanimous acceptance of such doctrinal statements by men representing so many differing and dissident groups was a big step in ecumenical progress.

The conference accepted an enormous amount of material, approving some of it and referring other parts of it to the churches. All the subjects listed above were covered, including the Sacraments, the Church, and the Ministry. Some proved thorny and difficult and required revision and resubmission to drafting commissions. It also adopted an Affirmation, in which it supported statements that express faith in an invisible spiritual fellowship in Christ, which none the less seeks visible expression in the lives of men through peaceful religious coexistence and a unity deeper than the separating divisions. Furthermore, it approved the appointment of a committee of thirty-five which was to co-operate with a similar committee, appointed just a few days earlier by the Life and Work Conference in Oxford, for the purpose of uniting both groups in a World Council of Churches. The proposal won approval, and Life and Work and Faith and Order could begin to plan their symbiosis.

In order to implement this program, it was resolved that a World Council of Churches be convened by 1940, in which a study of doctrine and co-operation in practice would be jointly undertaken. A year prior to the proposed date World War II began, and no such world convention was possible. This war between the nations, however, afforded a great opportunity to test faith in the task of relief on a global scale. Although not officially and formally constituted, the World Council of Churches functioned in a mission of mercy thrust on it by uprooted, dispersed, and displaced human beings of all ages and many nationalities.

All this does not mean that Faith and Order studies were dropped. They were continued, especially in England and in the United States. The committee or commission on "The Church," headed in England by Dr. R. Newton Flew and in the States by Dr. George W. Richards, carried on its work and established a growing understanding among the theologians of the Anglo-American and the Scandinavian countries. Somehow, also through the World Council, contacts were kept open between Christians in Germany and in the Allied countries of the West.²

The first meeting of churchmen from both sides after World War II was natural and without strain, no doubt because of earlier ecumenical experiences. In 1946 plans were at once initiated for a meeting at Amsterdam. The necessary preparatory commissions were appointed to draw up papers, reports, and resolutions on the general theme: "Man's Disorder and God's Design," with the following subtopics: (1) The Universal Church in God's Design; (2) The Church's Witness to God's Design; (3) The Church and Disorder of Society; (4) The Church and the International Disorder.

Faith and Order, in addition, prepared those portions of the constitution of the World Council of Churches that would serve to set up and regulate the commission for Faith and Order as an integral part of the WCC, yet preserve it as relatively independent. These provisions recognized the importance of the problems of Faith and Order if churches were not only to work together effectively but also come to an understanding on doctrine and polity. In preparation for Amsterdam and subsequently for Lund, where Faith and Order held its first post-Amsterdam Conference in 1952, Faith and Order publications dealt with such topics as: The Church, Intercommunion, Ways of Worship, Ministry, Biblical Interpretation Today. All of these were at the same time areas of unity and of division.

While Life and Work, as we shall show later, is pretty well continued in the WCC in the form of a Study Department, Faith and Order exists as part of the WCC in the form of a Commission. Some nervousness and some fear appeared in certain quarters that this continuation of Faith and Order actually denies the profession

² Hanns Lilje, *Im finstern Tal*, passim.

of unity which the WCC presumably stands for and implements. Yet who would want to maintain that the faith of the 161 churches is one, except as they accept the basis of the WCC? So while voices will no doubt be heard from time to time to drop Faith and Order or to incorporate it into the Study Department, such men as Dodd, Newbigin, Tompkins, Bell, Zander, Alivisatos, Schlink, Hodgson, Nygren, Hebert, and a host of others insist that while working together, the churches must also be learning together, i. e., learning to know themselves and one another better. The convictions, represented by Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, Orthodox, and Free Church theology, are still divergent enough to prevent a complete mutual recognition. Such an inner unity is what everybody is still waiting, working, and praying for.

The third World Conference on Faith and Order (Lausanne 1927 and Edinburgh 1937 being the first two) was held at Lund in 1952. Still greater progress toward agreement was reached, but at the same time a more acute sharpening of the doctrinal differences became apparent. Temple of Canterbury († 1944) was replaced by Bishop Brilioth of Sweden. Other changes in personnel in all categories of representation took place. But the emphasis, goals, and areas of study remained the same. Looking toward Evanston, the second world assembly of the WCC, Faith and Order was assigned the task of preparing material for discussion on the topic "Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches."

Thus Faith and Order, a direct outgrowth of missionary concern for ecumenical problems and their solution, exists today and fulfills a need in the larger framework of the WCC. Faith must be expressed and order must be maintained. It would appear, therefore, that Faith and Order, as such or under a number of other titles, will play its role as conference, commission, or department in the WCC for some time to come.

LIFE AND WORK CONFERENCE, 1920—1948

Since Archbishop Nathan Söderblom of Sweden played such an important role in the beginnings of Life and Work, it may be well to review briefly his attempts to accomplish some aspects of its objectives before the preliminary and organizing meetings in Geneva and Stockholm, 1920 and 1925.

Söderblom made strenuous efforts to call conferences of churchmen and, through their influence, of statesmen before and during World War I to head off that conflict and then to shorten it. All through the war he tried to establish what would later have been known as ecumenical contacts between church and state leaders of the belligerent countries. After the armistice in the fall of 1918, he was therefore very eager to have his efforts eventuate in a conference on Life and Work. Although the postwar tension and atmosphere of recrimination between former enemies seemed an almost insurmountable obstacle, he succeeded in calling and leading a preliminary meeting at Geneva in 1920, just before the well-known pre-Lausanne Geneva conference. Almost simultaneously the Orthodox churches of the East had issued an encyclical invitation to the Western churches to work together in healing the wounds left by the war. It is interesting that these otherwise so isolated churches of the Orthodox tradition spoke out so strongly for co-operation despite their rigid doctrinal position, almost as soon as possible after their liberation from five or more centuries of suppression, persecution, and domination by the empire of the Moslem Turks.

Encouraged by the show of interest by churches of all lands, the Uppsala primate proceeded to lay the groundwork for the first ecumenical meeting of the modern era in Stockholm in 1925.

At Stockholm speeches were made, papers read, and resolutions passed that seem naïve and elementary to some today. Yet at that time they represented a series of unprecedented developments. As the very name of the conference indicates, Life and Work emphasized the translation of Christian views, convictions, and outlooks into the life of the home, society, the state, the nations, and the world. It tried to be a sort of ecclesiastical, though not official, counterpart to the then so widely hailed League of Nations. At Stockholm a Söderblom, a Germanos, a Temple, a Deissmann, a Keller, a Cadman, could speak their conscience and mind as never before in an international forum.

The Stockholm report shows that the conference grappled with a wide variety of hard social, political, and ideological problems against a background of disillusionment which resulted from the undemocratic sequels of a war fought to save democracy. Some

questioned whether this mass of social and political problems was the direct concern of the church as such. The majority insisted that the objectives before the conference were the normal, natural, and necessary result and corollary of faith and doctrine. As a result the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work was created to continue the program of the conference. It performed this task through meetings, correspondence, and a number of publications, and held its second meeting at Oxford in 1937.

Stockholm accordingly laid the groundwork for study and exchange of views in the area of life and work that concern not only the churches but also the nations in which the churches live, move, and have their being. *Praktisches Christentum*, not as distinguished or excluded from Faith and Order, but rather issuing forth from the faith of people living under different ecclesiastical, political, domestic, and social orders — this German name for Life and Work accurately expresses and indicates what Söderblom, Stockholm, and therefore also Oxford and eventually Amsterdam and the World Council of Churches affirmed, namely, that faith does not live in a vacuum, that faith without works is dead, and that a monastic, ascetic withdrawal of the believer from the world of life and action may be a denial of the very faith he professes.

The titles of the published results of the conferences that took place between Stockholm, 1925, and Oxford, 1937, are indicative of the concerns of the Life and Work Council, as part of the larger ecumenical picture: *The Church and Its Function in Society; The Christian Understanding of Man; The Kingdom of God and History; The Christian Faith and the Common Life; Church and Community; Church, Community, and State in Relation to Education; The Universal Church and the World of Nations; Revelation.*

At Stockholm and Oxford also the inner life of those participating was not overlooked. Services of worship, prayer, and Communion were held regularly. At Stockholm the Church of Sweden invited conferees to services and a Communion celebration, and the Church of England extended a similar invitation at Oxford.

Dr. J. H. Oldham in his report writes of the half-hour morning and twenty-minute evening devotions held at St. Mary's Church, Oxford: "If one may judge from conversations with many of the delegates, the feeling of the majority, as they look back on the

Conference, is that what meant most to them was the common worship in St. Mary's Church. There was little in the nature of an address at the services. The time was given almost wholly to worship and intercession. There were considerable spaces of silence. It was evident that the members of the Conference felt that, notwithstanding the intense and unremitting pressure of business, leaving little time for rest and recreation, these opportunities of united prayer were something that they could not afford to miss. It is hardly possible to convey to those who were not present what the daily united worship in a company drawn from many countries, peoples, and races, and from many different streams of Christian tradition, meant to those who took part in it. In the periods of silence there was often an overpowering sense that things were happening in the spiritual world and that in the coming years one might expect to see in the breaking out of new life in countless directions an answer to the prayers that were being offered together to God."³

Oldham then describes the one-and-one-half-hour prayer service during the conference, in which intercession was made for the world-wide church, mentioning the countries by name. Prayer was then offered for the conference deliberations and for the members that they might be given a sense of creatureliness, the spirit of confidence and hope. (*OR*, p. 19.)

Of the Communion service celebrated in St. Mary's the same official reporter said: "The official delegates and those accompanying them gathered at St. Mary's, where the Archbishop of Canterbury [Cosmo Lang] celebrated. The picture of the congregation at St. Mary's filling almost the entire church and composed of representatives of many nations and races, all confessing allegiance to one Head and all partaking of the one bread and the one cup, will not quickly fade from the memories of those who took part." (*OR*, p. 21.)

The subjects of discussion that were studied in the framework of these services were those of the printed reports listed previously, but worded thus: Church and Community; Church and State;

³ *The Oxford Report*, ed. J. H. Oldham, p. 18, in the following referred to as *OR*.

Church, Community, and State in Relation to the Economic Order, to Education; the Universal Church and the World of Nations. Two longer reports on church and community and state were also made.

A few short quotations from the Oxford Report will best summarize these reports. "The first duty of the Church, and its greatest service to the world, is that it be in very deed the Church: Confessing the true faith, committed to the fulfillment of the will of Christ, its only Lord, and united in Him in a fellowship of love and service. Our unity in Christ is not a theme for aspiration, it is an experienced fact. We are drawn from many nations and from many different communions, from churches with centuries of history behind them and from the younger churches, whose story covers but a few decades; but we are one in Christ." (*OR*, p. 57.)

In its comment on race, community, war, the state, economics, social justice, education, and youth, the Report states: "We have tried during these days at Oxford [July 12—26, 1937] to look without illusion at the chaos and disintegration of the world, the injustices of the social order, and the menace and horror of war. The world is anxious and bewildered and full of pain and fear. We are troubled, yet we do not despair. Our hope is anchored in the living God. In Christ, and in the union of man with God and of man with man, which He creates, life even in the face of these evils has a meaning. In His name we set our hands, as servants of God and in Him of one another, to the task of proclaiming God's message of redemption, of living as His children, and of combating injustice, cruelty, and hate. The Church can be of good cheer; it hears its Lord saying, 'I have overcome the world!'" (*OR*, pp. 58 ff.)

Like the Edinburgh Conference on Faith and Order, the Oxford Conference of the Universal Christian Council on Life and Work decided to take steps toward founding, organizing, and operating the World Council of Churches by merging the two conferences. Thirty-five representatives of Oxford and thirty-five of Edinburgh were authorized to appoint a committee of fourteen, who in turn undertook the formation of the World Council. Dr. W. Visser 't Hooft, active with the organizers of Oxford and a former YMCA

and SCM secretary, became the executive secretary of the Council in Formation, while Pasteur Marc Boegner of the French Reformed Church became the president of the provisional continuation committee. Thus the merger was accomplished at the direction of both groups: Life and Work in the form of a continuation committee, Faith and Order as the Commission of Faith and Order.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AT AMSTERDAM, 1948, AND THEREAFTER

The preparation, organization, program, message, and post-assembly publications of the first meeting of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, Holland, August 22 to September 4, 1948, followed the pattern of previous meetings of Faith and Order and of Life and Work. At Amsterdam, however, the participating churches exceeded in number those of the previous gatherings of either of the two converging groups or of the two combined. One hundred sixty-one churches represented by 500 delegates, aided by many advisers, experts, scholars, and theologians, joined in the attempt of effecting progress in the unification of faith, order, life, and work out of the diversity of the churches of the world. Such an ambitious program faced any number of hazards: the possibility of over- or understating theological difference and similarity; the risk of overorganizing the preparations so that too small an area would be left for discussion and decision by the assembly; the danger of taking sides in the recently ended war or in the growing political divergence between East and West; the possibility of compromising rather than expressing frankly the differences between what is conveniently called the Old and the New World or the Continental and the Anglo-American approach to theology. None of these hazards was overlooked in the preparation for Amsterdam, and none was completely avoided at the assembly and in the postassembly evaluations. But none of them proved to be disastrous to the ecumenical movement of the Council. The discussions at Amsterdam were far from superficial; political collision was pretty well avoided; and the intercontinental debate ran off in a wholesome, frank, and brotherly atmosphere.

The general theme of Amsterdam was "Man's Disorder and God's Design." This theme and the key sentence(s) of its message

to the churches and the world express the convictions of those who prepared, convened, and guided the conference. The introduction of the Assembly Report sums it up thus: "We are divided from one another not only on matters of faith, order, and tradition but also by pride of nation, class, and race. But Christ has made us one, and He is not divided. In seeking to find Him we find one another. Here at Amsterdam we have committed ourselves afresh to Him and have covenanted together with one another in constituting the World Council of Churches. *We intend to stay together.*⁴ We call on Christian congregations everywhere to endorse and fulfill this covenant in their relations with one another. In thankfulness to God we commit the future to Him. . . . We have to make of the Church in every place a voice for those who have no voice, and a home where every man will be at home. We have to learn afresh together what is the duty of the Christian man or woman in industry, in agriculture, in politics, in the professions, and in the home. We have to ask God to teach us together to say NO and YES in truth. NO to all that flouts the love of Christ, to every system, every programme and every person that treats any man as if he were an irresponsible thing or means of profit, to the defenders of injustice in the name of order, to those who sow the seeds of war or urge war as inevitable; YES, to all that conforms to the love of Christ, to all who seek for justice, to the peacemakers, to all who hope, fight, and suffer for the cause of man, to all who—even without knowing it—look for the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. It is not in man's power to banish sin and death from the earth, to create the unity of the Holy Catholic Church, to conquer the hosts of Satan. But it is within the power of God. He has given us at Easter the certainty that His purpose will be accomplished. But by our acts of obedience and faith we can on earth set up signs which point to the coming victory. Till the day of victory our lives are hid with Christ in God, and no earthly disillusionment or distress or power of hell can separate us from Him. As those who wait in confidence and joy for their deliverance,

⁴ This sentence has since become the motto of the World Council of Churches.

let us give ourselves to those tasks which lie to our hands, and to set up signs that men may see."⁵

Since Amsterdam the World Council has operated under its new constitution. Some of its provisions are presented here to indicate the theological and practical position and program to which the member churches commit themselves.

The basis of the World Council of Churches is as follows:

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior. It is constituted for the discharge of the functions set out below.

Membership is obtained upon application by churches who accept the basis and satisfy prescribed criteria. For acceptance into the council the requirement is either a two-thirds vote of the Assembly, or the failure of the central committee, after accepting a church provisionally, to receive objections from more than one third of the member bodies. (*AAR*, p. 197.)

The functions and authority of the World Council are stated thus:

(i) To carry on the work of the two world movements for Faith and Order and for Life and Work.

(ii) To promote co-operation in study.

(iii) To facilitate common action by the churches.

(iv) To promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the members of all churches.

(v) To establish relations with denominational federations of world-wide scope and with other ecumenical movements.

(vi) To call world conferences on specific subjects as occasion may require, such conferences being empowered to publish their own findings.

(vii) To support the churches in their task of evangelism.

The World Council shall offer counsel and provide opportunity of united action in matters of common interest.

It may take action on behalf of constituent churches in such matters as one or more of them may commit to it.

It shall have authority to call regional and world conferences on specific subjects as occasion may require.

The World Council shall not legislate for the Churches; nor shall it act for them in any manner except as indicated above or as may hereafter be specified by the constituent churches.

(*AAR*, p. 198.)

⁵ *Amsterdam Assembly Report*, pp. 9—11, hereafter designated *AAR*.

Further portions of this constitution and the rules of the World Council provide for the implementing of its program. The day-to-day work of the Council is carried on by a number of groups:

1. The secretariat with headquarters in Geneva, New York, and London. Dr. Willem Visser 't Hooft, secretary since 1948 and rechosen in 1954 at Evanston, is assisted by numerous and various persons, a considerable staff of clerical and lay personnel, in operating the program of relief, study, liaison, research, publication, and interpretation undertaken by the council.

2. The Central Committee is made up of the six presidents, the executive, and the ninety persons elected by the Assembly. It meets annually and carries on its continuation work through an executive committee of twelve persons chosen, in addition to the presidents and the president and the vice-president of the Central Committee.

Since Amsterdam the Central Committee has met at Woudschoten, Chichester, Toronto, Rolle, Lucknow, and Melbourne. Each time it published a long report of current business, theological or social pronouncements, such as the famous "The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches" of Toronto, and its judgment on the Korean War. Perhaps the most important development is the gradual merging of Faith and Order and Life and Work into one smoothly running organization. It appears, especially after the Evanston assembly, that Life and Work is really the concern of the World Council. Faith and Order seems to operate more and more without exerting a tangible or immediate influence on the churches belonging to the council. This situation obtains despite all protestations that Faith and Order is the heart of the World Council and that a great deal of Faith and Order work went into the Lund meeting and into the preparation of the chief Evanston report on "Christ, the Hope of the World."

Some of the activities carried on by the Council since 1948 deserve mention. The Ecumenical Institute, housed in the Chateaux Bossey Grand et Petit near Geneva, Switzerland, and headed by Dr. Hendrik Kramer, a former missionary to Moslems, operates like the German *Akademien*. It is a center which permits lay persons from churches all over the world to meet one another

and to study common problems. When they return to their homes, they are expected to promote Christian unity on the congregational level. The institute is a gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

The Council has a large publication program. Its chief periodical is the *Ecumenical Review*. In existence since October 1948, this quarterly is of inestimable value as a source of information regarding everything on the ecumenical front, but it also contains much scholarly material dealing more indirectly with ecumenism. The Council has also published a considerable number of study documents for Faith and Order which have come out in a new series since Amsterdam. Of the same nature are all publications relating to the Churches' Commission on International Affairs (CCIA), the commission on Interchurch Aid and Refugees, and all documents related to the assembly meetings. In 1954 the *History of the Ecumenical Movement* appeared on the market. It was the work of two full-time WCC writers and research experts who served as editors: Miss Ruth Rouse and Bishop Stephen Neill. In addition a staff of 13 writers from six countries and eight different denominations collaborated in producing this publication. It represents the first endeavor to present the history of the church, especially of the last four centuries, as a search for unity, union, and uniformity. It is indispensable in any attempt to evaluate the Council as a latter-day expression of ecumenism.

The World Council is not committed specifically to promote church unions and mergers through direct intervention in the inner workings of the member churches or other churches, but seeks rather to further understanding that may lead to the establishing of closer ties. Nevertheless no one can deny that the creation and existence of the Council has had an effect on the highest level of church administration and theological study. Above all, it has exerted its influence on the local level, where the church lives and where it is disunited. Its ideals have indeed not been fully realized. In commenting on the second assembly of the World Council in Evanston (1954), the *Christian Century* said that "the meeting will not have much effect on the scandal of denominational competition in our American towns. It will do little to efface the bewilderment of African natives over the conflicting claims of various church ordinances. It will not be

remembered for having carried forward the cause of Christian unity."⁶ The World Council has, however, not failed in achieving more fully some of the purposes which Faith and Order and Life and Work had fostered. It has brought the churches together for repeated discussions of the doctrines that separate them and created a considerable measure of mutual respect and understanding. It has discovered that differences cross confessional lines and are not necessarily confined to the strict limits of denominations. It has increasingly become the instrument of works of charity, love, and international protest against injustice and wrong. Its future course, both in theological discussion and approaches to real unity and in continued works of love on a broad inter-confessional basis, will remain world wide and thus supplement and link the work of federations and councils in the individual countries.

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⁶ *The Christian Century*, LXXI, 1125.

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