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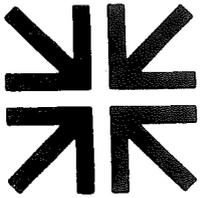
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TSF BULLETIN

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INTERSECTION

(The integration of theological studies with ethics, academic disciplines, and ecclesiastical institutions.)

AN EVANGELICAL OBSERVES A WCC ASSEMBLY

By Clark Pinnock

From May 12-24 a conference on mission and evangelism was held by the World Council of Churches in Melbourne, Australia. It was the first of its kind since the controversial meetings in Bangkok in 1972 and I was privileged to attend as an invited guest and advisor.

About 600 attended, one half delegates from member churches, and the rest advisors like myself and newsmen who were often theologians in disguise. The atmosphere was festive, full of variety and color. Meeting on a university campus in a large Australian city, the conference was superbly organized and staffed, and met to discuss the general theme "Your Kingdom Come."

We were welcomed at the gate the first afternoon by none other than Carl McIntyre together with a small band of sign-toting conservatives warning us not to consort with spiritual darkness and political communism. As I shared with some of the demonstrators at the time, the situation was not quite as simple as that.

The opening papers sharpened the questions I brought with me. WCC general secretary Philip Potter traced the history of the ecumenical movement since Edinburgh in 1910, giving me the impression he saw only a growing resolve to carry out the Great Commission and not any going back on that commitment. Emilio Castro, director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC, added his voice, insisting that he and his department and the whole WCC movement were solidly behind proclamation evangelism, making the appeal indirectly to the evangelicals to join forces with them in forwarding the goal of reaching the whole world with the gospel. Then the German New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann developed the theme of the coming of the Kingdom of God in terms of a struggle with the powers of this age, drawing upon apocalyptic biblical images to explain the role of the church in today's world.

Besides the plenary sessions, we met in small Bible study groups, led by such people as Krister Sten-dahl, John Yoder, and Orlando Costas, and in sections which examined with particular topics "Good News to the Poor," "The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles" and "The Crucified Christ Challenges Human Power" as well as in sub-sections which looked at aspects of these broader themes. The membership of the WCC has shifted away from any Western dominance in the direction of the fuller participation of Third World churches and this has meant a greater and greater concern for the issues of hunger, poverty, and human struggles in the ecumenical movement.

No one group really dominated the conference, but noticeably present was the Latin American delegation. The Latins brought with them the themes of liberation theology which dominate the thinking of the WCC these days, namely, a deep concern for poor and disenfranchised peoples, which sparked naturally enough a vigorous debate over the form in which this concern ought to be expressed and pursued. Some saw it in terms of a life and death struggle with the capitalist system. Others insisted that the gospel was good news and bad news to us all, and who called for a responsible society without indicating any essential ideological character to it. Between the two broad groups there were considerable tensions and mutual feelings which in the end were not completely resolved.

The Soviet delegates made no attempt to exploit the revolutionary fervor displayed by the Third World people. Only when a Pakistani delegate suggested the house condemn the Russian invasion of Afghanistan did they leap to their feet and race to the microphones to renounce any criticism of their policies there. There was little doubt in anyone's mind that it was a lot easier to criticize South Africa and the USA than any communist or newly "liberated" Third World region.

The charge of selective indignation on the part of the WCC certainly has some basis, but I do not think this is due to WCC politics as much as the realities of world politics today. Therefore the assembly passed a sensible motion which admitted how difficult it was to name specifically all the concerns Christians have and expressed sorrow over this. The motion was ably put by David Bosch from South Africa, an evangelical delegate who left a clear mark on the deliberations.

I myself participated in the section "Witnessing to the Kingdom" which produced a remarkably sound and biblical report on holistic evangelism. I was thrilled to hear the joyful testimony of Kimbanguist Bena-Silu of Zaire and the powerful challenge to conduct mass evangelism efforts throughout the world given by Methodist evangelist Allan Walker, and I was amazed to discover how much solid biblical content could be agreed to by a large assembly of very diverse Christians from around the world. Granted the sentiments were often vague and general and the wording was chosen to create the impression of unity. Nevertheless, central biblical truths were clearly enunciated and the call to evangelize the whole world definitely issued.

Leaving behind mere description, what lessons did I learn from the experience of Melbourne, 1980? First, I came away convinced of the value of such broad ecumenical gatherings. Carl McIntyre is wrong. Evangelicals need to engage in discussion with Christians from other parts of the church, if only for the sake of clarifying their own identity

And there are other benefits, too. Not least the occasion to come into contact with genuine faith and commitment among people we seldom meet in ordinary circumstances, and the opportunity to bear witness to the gospel as we understand it. The WCC needs, if I may say so, the evangelical witness. Certain biblical themes tend to get left out if evangelicals are not present. The tendency to interpret the gospel solely on the horizontal level and mission in terms only of social reconstruction has to be confronted and corrected. The WCC does tend to forget, without necessarily denying it, our Lord's command to spread the gospel among all nations, and we need to remind them of that.

Secondly, I came away with the impression that the WCC is a forum for Christian discussion and interaction and not a super-church dominated by politically left-wing liberals. Of course the forces of socialism and of modernism are present, too, but not wildly out of proportion and not in control in such a way that other views are suppressed and not heard. The Orthodox presence, for example affects the WCC tremendously in all areas, making it mandatory for example to formulate theological statements in a trinitarian structure and to respect the special dignity and calling of the church in the world. Evangelicals, too, are able to make themselves heard and influence significantly the course of events.

Third, did the Melbourne assembly do anything to bridge the gap between the approach taken at Bangkok and the Lausanne Covenant movement? Yes, I think it did, in a measure. The emphasis at Bangkok on human liberation was certainly present at Melbourne--but then again it had to be. It is

scriptural concern. But also present was a strong concern to reach all people with the good news about Jesus. I would say that there is movement on both sides of the divide. Lausanne itself is a bridge to the WCC in the sense that its covenant came out strongly for holistic evangelism, and now I believe we are seeing the WCC answer to that initiative in the form of a renewed commitment and concern for the evangelization of the whole world.

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Note: Next month Orlando Costas and Peter Wagner will offer views on the COWE Thailand gathering.

CHRISTIANITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY Brief Bibliography

David W. Gill, Asst. Professor of Christian Ethics, New College, Berkeley.

The issue of homosexuality is not going to go away in the 1980's. With the retreat of Anity Bryant's forces on the one hand, and the retreat of "gay rights" advocates from the initiative process on the other, we are temporarily, at least, free of the acrimonious battles that filled the front pages of newspapers during the late 1970's. This calm does not necessarily have to be followed by a further period of storms, though that is certainly possible. Outward calm or not, the issues raised by homosexuality are not completely resolved. Advocates of various positions continue to make their cases in person and in print. Books are quietly pouring from the press.

Like the literature on feminism or nuclear power and weapons, the literature on homosexuality is becoming so extensive that one would need to read almost constantly in this area alone to keep up with it. Since few will be able to attempt that task, and yet all thoughtful Christians must engage in some responsible interaction with the issues, it might be helpful to list a few books which will, together, set forth the issues and options.

Homosexuality and Ethics, edited by Edward Batchelor, Jr. (New York: Pilgrim, 1980, 261 pp. 10.95) is a new and welcome contribution to the literature. The heart of the book is a series of readings organized according to five schools of thought: (1) traditionalists who condemn homosexual acts based on biblical, extrabiblical, and natural law arguments (includes Aquinas and Barth); (2) "neo-traditionalists" (including Milhaven and Arnhouse) who also condemn homosexuality but on "liberal" premises, including psycho-sociological reasons; (3) those who consider homosexuality objectively wrong but tend to excuse the individual constitutional homosexual of responsibility for his/her orientation and possibly action (Curran, Kielicke); (4) those who consider that all sexual acts should be evaluated on the basis of their relational significance (Pittenger); (5) those revisionists who teach that homosexuality is natural and good.

The sixteen individual selections organized in these categories are an excellent introduction to the broader dimensions of the discussion. In addition, Batchelor has recruited introductory and concluding reflections from several theologians and ethicists (including Roger Shinn, Gregory Baum, Rosemary Reuther, James Nelson, and Lisa Cahill) and added an appendix of official pronouncements on homosexuality by various church bodies and some professional groups.

Most, if not all, of the contributors to Batchelor's book are "mainstream" Protestants and Catholics. Within the American "Evangelical" camp (broadly speaking) a range of responses has also emerged. At the extreme negative end of this spectrum is Greg L. Bahnsen's *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, 152 pp. \$6.95 (paper)). Rejecting the idea of innate homosexual orientation or constitution, Bahnsen argues that homosexuality is grievous sin, that individual homosexuals are personally responsible for their sinful sexual choices, and that repentance and salvation are the only way out. He argues that the church should purge unrepentant homosexuals from its ranks. Finally, he argues loudly that homosexuality should be made a crime under civil law and implies that the penalty should be death, as it was in Leviticus.

At the extreme positive end of the spectrum is Ralph Blair of Evangelicals Concerned, Inc. (30 E. 60th St., New York NY 10022), author of "An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality" and other pamphlets. Blair argues that Christians who are by nature homosexually oriented should be accepted as Christ accepts them and encouraged to live responsibly as homosexual Christian disciples. Two other authors whose approach is similar to that of Blair are Troy Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* (Los Angeles: Nash, 1972), and Tom Horner, *Jonathon Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978, 163 pp. \$5.95).

What Blair openly advocates is suggested only as a possibility by Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978, 159 pp. \$6.95). A great deal of Scanzoni and Mollenkott's argument is directed against the ignorance, stigmatizing, stereotyping, and lack of love of "homophobic" Christians. The authors are very loving, thorough and effective in this pastoral task. Their discussion of what "science says" about homosexuality is very helpful but the companion discussion of what the Bible says is inadequate, mainly because it ignores the broader biblical theology of sexuality and focuses only on the problem texts dealing explicitly with homosexuality. Without explicitly advocating it, the authors suggest consideration of an alternative to the traditional stance of the church: permanent, covenantal homosexual relationships analogous to heterosexual marriage. It is clear that Scanzoni and Mollenkott lean toward this view.

Two books which take a negative position, but not nearly as extreme as Bahnsen, are *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?* by Don Williams (Los Angeles: BIM (Revell), 1978, 170 pp. \$4.95), and *Homosexuality and the Church* by Richard F. Lovelace (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1978, 158pp). Both Williams and Lovelace served on the National Task Force to Study Homosexuality for the United Presbyterian Church, USA, and hammered out their positions in relation to a majority on the committee who disagreed with them, a much healthier context for learning than many have had. Both authors sift through the major contemporary points of view with a degree of respect. Their handling of the biblical material is much better than Bahnsen, Scanzoni, Mollenkott, Blair, and Horner because they work at the specific references to homosexuality from a broad, convincing biblical theology of sexuality. They conclude against acceptance of homosexual practice (and ordination) within the Christian church but advocate greater love, understanding, evangelism, and aid to homosexuals. They do not support movements to deprive homosexuals of civil and human rights in the broader society.

There remains a lot of work to be done on this subject. If it isn't obvious yet, my own opinion is that Williams and Lovelace are closest to the target, which is faithfulness to Jesus Christ.