new millennium, the focus of ecumenical activity most likely will not be directed primarily on the WCC but on the churches themselves.

TOM STRANSKY

Mand So Set Up Signs... The WCC's First 40 Years, WCC, 1988 Mand Commemorating Amsterdam 1948 (= ER, 40, 3-4, 1988) H.E. Fey ed., The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement, vol. 2: 1948-1968, London, SPCK, 1970 Financial Report 2001, WCC D. Kessler ed., Together on the Way: The Harare Report, WCC, 1999 Mand "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC", articles on the draft in ER, 50, 3, 1998; final text, 51, 1, 1999 Mand Mandeleren & M. Conway, Introducing the World Council of Churches, WCC, 2001 Way. A. Visser't Hooft, The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches, WCC, 1982.

WCC ASSEMBLIES

Constitutionally, an assembly – held approximately every seven years – is the "supreme legislative body" of the World Council of Churches. Delegates are appointed by member churches, with the number to which each church is entitled determined by size (every member church may send at least one delegate). Allowance is made in the allocation of delegates for balancing confessional, cultural and geographical representation.

Member churches are urged to select their assembly delegates in a way that will ensure good distribution of church officials, parish ministers and laity, men and women and persons under the age of 30. Moreover, to improve balance or provide special knowledge and experience, up to 15% of the delegates may be persons proposed by the WCC central committee, which then asks their churches to name them as additional delegates.

Also present at each assembly is a wide range of non-voting advisers, representatives and observers from non-member churches or other ecumenical organizations and guests (including, since the fifth assembly, persons of other faiths). An assembly usually draws several hundred press and media persons, many of whom are ecumenically involved clergy and laity; and in recent assemblies, extensive programmes have

been arranged for visitors, including local people.

At the most recent assembly (Harare 1998), a new feature was the "padare", the Zimbabwe Shona word for a village meeting place to which anyone may bring concerns for public discussion. Some 400 open forums were offered on subjects ranging from single causes (e.g. violence against women, interchurch marriages, debt relief) to faith and order issues and the performing arts.

Assemblies are too large and infrequent to make detailed decisions: close to 5000 people were present at Harare. Rather, they look at the wider ecumenical picture: evaluating what the WCC has done since the previous assembly, seeking a common assessment of current issues demanding ecumenical attention and specifying broadly what the Council should focus on until the next assembly. They elect the WCC presidents and, from among delegates present, members of the central committee.

The assembly has become primarily the unique international intercultural forum or "ecumenical space" of communal worship and celebration, education, shared experiences and renewed ecumenical commitment, and of "owning" the WCC as instrumental servant of the one ecumenical movement in its diverse expressions within the hospitable household of faith. For this reason, despite the preparatory staff time and energy, and increasing costs, voices to eliminate the assembly have never won out in discussions of WCC structural reforms. Everyone agrees that the assembly as an event gives the opportunity for the WCC to reconstitute itself, and for the member churches to improve relations and communication among themselves.

This entry offers a brief overview of each of the WCC's eight assemblies.

First assembly: "Man's Disorder and God's Design"; Amsterdam, Netherlands, 22 August to 4 September 1948; 351 delgates, from 147 member churches.

Sections: (1) the universal church in God's design, (2) the church's witness to God's design, (3) the church and the disorder of society, (4) the church and the international order.

Central committee moderator: George Bell; vice-moderator: Franklin Clark Fry; presidium: Marc Boegner, Geoffrey Fisher, T.C. Chao (from 1951 Sarah Chakko), G. Bromley Oxnam, Germanos of Thyateira (from 1951 Athenagoras of Thyateira), Erling Eidem (from 1950 Eivind Berggrav); honorary president: John R. Mott.

The WCC's first assembly marked the assumption by the churches of responsibility for the ecumenical movement, as its message made clear: "Here at Amsterdam we have... covenanted with one another in constituting this World Council of Churches. We intend to stay together." Those constituting this world body, however, were largely from North America and Western Europe - only 30 of the founding churches came from Africa, Asia (including 5 from China) and Latin America. Although the term "younger churches" was often used for the latter bodies, they in fact included some of the oldest (Church of Ethiopia and Orthodox Syrian Church of Malabar); and among Western churches were some of the youngest (Old Catholic Church and Salvation Army).

Amsterdam said clearly that the churches had decided to come together in accordance with the will of the Lord of the church. Where this common way would lead them could not be foreseen. "We acknowledge", the report of section 1 emphasized, "that he is powerfully at work amongst us to lead us further to goals which we but dimly discern."

The first assembly adopted the WCC constitution (revised at successive assemblies), laid down conditions for membership, outlined programmes, discussed relationships with other ecumenical bodies and addressed a message to the churches – a practice repeated by succeeding assemblies. The "nature of the Council", defined in an assembly statement, would be further elaborated on by the statement "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches", adopted by the central committee at Toronto in 1950 (see Toronto statement).

Section 2 expressed the indissoluble connection between unity* and inner renewal: "As Christ purifies us by his Spirit we shall find that we are drawn together and that there is no gain in unity unless it is

unity in truth and holiness." Evangelism* was seen as the common task of all the churches, and the present day as "the beginning of a new epoch of missionary enterprise". Mission* and evangelism belong together and condition one another; and the distinction between "Christian" and "non-Christian" nations must be discarded. The question of the training of the laity* was examined by a special committee, which took as its starting point the experience of the already established Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.*

In section 3 emerged the ecumenical concept of the "responsible society",* as opposed to both laissez-faire capitalism and totalitarian communism. "Each has made promises which it could not redeem. Communist ideology puts the emphasis upon economic justice, and promises that freedom will come automatically after the completion of the revolution. Capitalism puts the emphasis upon freedom, and promises that justice will follow as a byproduct of free enterprise; that, too, is an ideology which has been proved false. It is the responsibility of Christians to seek new, creative solutions which never allow either justice or freedom to destroy the other." It was also agreed that since "no civilization, however 'Christian'", can escape the radical judgment of the Word of God, none is to be accepted uncritically.

Section 4 was able to encompass such divergent views as those of the Czech theologian Josef L. Hromádka and John Foster Dulles (later US secretary of state). While this showed the strength of the fellowship in the newly formed Council, it also put that strength to its first test. Two points in this section were significant for the future: (1) rejection in principle of war as "contrary to the will of God", but inability to endorse such rejection unanimously; (2) concern that every kind of tyranny and imperialism calls for opposition, struggle and efforts to secure basic human liberties for all, especially religious freedom.

Second assembly: "Christ – the Hope of the World"; Evanston, IL, USA, 15 to 31 August 1954; 502 delegates, from 161 member churches.

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Sections: (1) our oneness in Christ and our disunity as churches, (2) the mission of the church to those outside her life, (3) the responsible society in a world perspective, (4) Christians in the struggle for world community, (5) the churches amid racial and ethnic tensions, (6) the laity: the Christian in his vocation.

Central committee moderator: Franklin Clark Fry: vice-moderator: Ernest Payne; presidium: John Baillie, Sante Uberto Barbieri, Otto Dibelius, Juhanon Mar Thoma, Michael (from 1959 Iakovos), Henry Knox Sherill; bonorary presidents: John R. Mott (d.1955) and George Bell.

If "staying together" was the motto of the Amsterdam assembly, Evanston's was "growing together". A deep sense of belonging together enabled the assembly to tackle its extremely difficult and controversial theological theme. A previously published report on the main theme, on which two dozen eminent theologians had worked for three years, acknowledged "sharp differences in theological viewpoint" in the discussions. The concept of Christian hope* among European churches tended to be eschatological, whereas North American churches stressed hope for the here and now. A reference to the hope of Israel (Rom. 9-11) introduced a discordant note and was omitted after a heated debate; many did not wish to recognize that the Jewish people occupy a special place in the history of salvation.

Evanston defined more clearly than Amsterdam the phrase "responsible society". It did not indicate "an alternative social or political system" but "a criterion by which we judge all existing social orders, and at the same time a standard to guide us in the specific choices we have to make". Like Amsterdam, Evanston addressed itself to "The Church in Relation to Communist-Non-Communist Tension". Priority in sections 3 and 4 went to "social and economic problems in the economically underdeveloped regions", a question to which the WCC was giving increasing attention. The assembly affirmed responsibility for Christian peace and justice and urged governments to ban all weapons of mass destruction and abstain from aggression. There were statements on religious liberty* and "intergroup relations", insisting on racial equality. Continuing the Amsterdam discussion, Evanston stressed even more strongly the missionary task of the laity, which "bridges the gulf between the church and the world" and "stands at the very outposts of the kingdom of God".

The so-called younger churches (except those in China, which had suspended their WCC participation in the wake of the Korean war) were much better represented than at the first assembly. Their presence was felt in many ways, especially in their impatience with the disunity of the churches. The accent on the missionary dimension of the churches' task, so characteristic of Amsterdam, was missing at Evanston. But the assembly did show that the Council was centred on the word of God, theologically alert and becoming better equipped to help the churches to discover their common heritage.

Third assembly: "Jesus Christ – the Light of the World"; New Delhi, India, 19 November to 5 December 1961; 577 delegates, from 197 member churches.

Sections: (1) witness, (2) service, (3) unity. Central committee moderator: Franklin Clark Fry; vice-moderators: Ernest Payne and J. Russell Chandran (1966-68); presidium: A. Michael Ramsey, Francis Ibiam, Iakovos, David G. Moses, Martin Niemöller, Charles C. Parlin; honorary president: Joseph H. Oldham.

New Delhi's theme was again Christocentric, but the discussion now included the issue of other world religions. The theme, however, was not given the same prominence as at previous assemblies, and served mainly as a sort of guiding principle. The International Missionary Council* was integrated into the WCC, becoming the Division on World Mission and Evangelism. The assembly approved an extension of the WCC basis* by adding the phrase "according to the scriptures", and the Trinitarian formula.

Of the 23 churches welcomed into WCC membership at New Delhi, 11 were African, 5 Asian and 2 South American. Only 5 were from Europe and North America. Two Pen-

tecostal churches from Chile formed a bridge to evangelical churches. The presence of the large Orthodox churches from Eastern Europe was regarded as an opportunity to ensure "a real spiritual dialogue" between Eastern and Western churches. "If we accept this opportunity our ecumenical task will not become easier, but we shall surely be greatly enriched." Out of the estimated 400 million Christians who belong to WCC member churches today, almost 140 million are Orthodox.

Section 1 faced the theological problem of understanding other religions in the light of Jesus Christ (a still-unresolved problem). Another issue was how to distinguish Christian service from mere philanthropy. Discussion in section 2 of the problems of political, economic and social change was largely oriented to the third world. In section 3, the unity of the church was conceived as "one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages..."

New Delhi took a renewed stand on religious liberty, adopted a resolution on antisemitism, clarified the churches' views on the international crisis and issued a message to Christians in South Africa and an "Appeal to All Governments and Peoples". The WCC had by now assumed increased responsibility for relief to people in distress, refugees and victims of catastrophes all over the world. In Amsterdam the churches committed themselves to stay together; in Evanston they affirmed their intention to grow together; and now they were eager to assume new tasks together.

Fourth assembly: "Behold, I Make All Things New"; Uppsala, Sweden, 4 to 20 July 1968; 704 delegates, from 235 member churches.

Sections: (1) the Holy Spirit and the catholicity of the church, (2) renewal in mission, (3) world economic and social development, (4) towards justice and peace in international affairs, (5) worship, (6) towards new styles of living.

Central committee moderator: M.M. Thomas; vice-moderators: Pauline Webb and Metropolitan Meliton; presidium: Patriarch German, Hanns Lilje, Daniel T. Niles, Kiyoko Takeda Cho, Ernest A. Payne, John Coventry Smith, Alphaeus H. Zulu; honorary presidents: Joseph Oldham and W.A. Visser 't Hooft.

Uppsala, the WCC's most activist and politically oriented assembly, can be seen as ending an era in the ecumenical movement and marking a new beginning. Typifying this was the vigorous presence of youth,* whose demonstrations made it clear that they were not satisfied with the role given them at the assembly.

Uppsala set the unity and catholicity* of the church squarely within the sphere of God's activity in history. Stating that "the church is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of mankind", the assembly admitted that secular "instruments of conciliation and unification... often seem more effective than the church itself". Therefore, "churches need a new openness to the world in its aspirations, its achievements, its restlessness and its despair". All church structures, from local to world level, must be examined to see whether they enable the church and its members to be in mission. More dialogue with the world and more effective proclamation of the good news are equally needed. For the first time the idea of "a genuinely universal council", able to speak for all Christians, was articulated.

In his assembly address the Jesuit Roberto Tucci referred to the possibility of the Roman Catholic Church joining the WCC – a challenge that was seriously discussed in the following years. Closer WCC relations with national and regional councils of churches was also high on the agenda.

The reality that the rich were becoming richer and the poor poorer dominated Uppsala's socio-political and economic discussions. The assembly recommended that the churches set aside 1% of their total income for development aid and appeal to their governments to invest the same percentage of their gross national product. The central issue in development is the criterion of the hu-

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man. Public opinion must be persuaded to support deep changes in both developed and developing nations.

Uppsala's discussion of worship* called on Christians to be open to learn from the practices of worship of other Christians. Describing worship as "ethical and social in nature" and thus "orientated towards the social injustices and divisions of mankind", the assembly specified that segregation by race or class in Christian worship must be rejected. It recommended "that all churches consider seriously the desirability of adopting the early Christian tradition of celebrating the eucharist every Sunday".

The assembly also grappled with how Christians make faithful ethical decisions. Social and cultural differences make a single style of Christian life impossible. Refusing to choose between "contextualism" and "rules", the gathering pressed for the position that individual moral choices can be made only in Christian community which is held together by biblical insight and the communion table.

In the wake of Uppsala several new programmes were added to the WCC: the Programme to Combat Racism* (PCR), the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development, the Christian Medical Commission, Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, and the Sub-unit on Education. Unit II, Justice and Service, became from 1971 onwards the largest unit in the Council.

Fifth assembly: "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites"; Nairobi, Kenya, 23 November to 10 December 1975; 676 delegates, from 285 member churches.

Sections: (1) confessing Christ today, (2) what unity requires, (3) seeking community, (4) education for liberation and community, (5) structures of injustice and struggles for liberation, (6) human development.

Central committee moderator: Edward W. Scott; vice-moderators: Jean Skuse and Karekin Sarkissian; presidium: Annie R. Jiagge, José Míguez Bonino, Nikodim (from 1979 Ilja II of Georgia), T.B. Simatupang, Olof Sundby, Cynthia Wedel; honorary president: W.A. Visser 't Hooft.

Nairobi has been described as an assembly of consolidation, providing theological undergirding for much that surfaced in Uppsala. It declared that faith in the Triune God and socio-political engagement, conversion to Jesus Christ and active participation in changing economic and social structures belong together and condition one another.

Among contentious discussions was that of interfaith dialogue:* the section report on this subject was referred back for reconsideration before a plenary vote. Some delegates in the West thought the report was weak and susceptible to interpretation as a spiritual compromise. Asian representatives, on the other hand, stressed that dialogue in no way diminishes full commitment to one's own faith. Far from leading to syncretism, it safeguards against it.

Debate on evangelism related spirituality* to involvement. As unity requires a commonly accepted goal, a fuller understanding of the context and companionship in struggle and hope, section 1 asked the churches to respond to the three agreed statements on *Baptism*, *Eucharist and Ministry** (BEM), compiled by the commission on Faith and Order.

The assembly resisted efforts to weaken the PCR and its special fund, but strove to understand this commitment to action on behalf of the oppressed in a more deeply theological way. The search for a "just, participatory and sustainable society"* became a major theme. Programmes on faith, science and technology, militarism and disarmament, ecology and human survival, the role of women in church and society, and renewal and congregational life received a new emphasis. Concern for sharing of resources entered ecumenical discussions.

The assembly's programme guidelines committee approved four "programme thrusts" until the next assembly: (1) expression and communication of our faith in the Triune God; (2) search for a just, participatory and sustainable society; (3) unity of the church and renewal of human community; (4) education and renewal in search of true community.

Sixth assembly: "Jesus Christ – the Life of the World"; Vancouver, Canada, 24 July to 10 August 1983; 847 delegates, from 301 member churches.

Issue groups: (1) witnessing in a divided world, (2) taking steps towards unity, (3) moving towards participation, (4) healing and sharing life in community, (5) confronting threats to peace and survival, (6) struggling for justice and human dignity, (7) learning in community, (8) communicating credibly.

Central committee moderator: Heinz Joachim Held; vice-moderators: Chrysostomos of Myra and Sylvia Talbot; presidium: Nita Barrow, Marga Bührig, Paulos Gregorius, Johannes W. Hempel, Ignatius IV, W.P. Khotso Makhulu, Lois M. Wilson; honorary president: W.A. Visser 't Hooft (d. 1985).

At Vancouver, some observers said, Amsterdam and Uppsala appeared to come to terms with each other. It was a "re-integrated" assembly. Great emphasis in this most representative gathering in ecumenical history fell on participation,* and up to 4500 people a day took part one way or another in the assembly. Of voting delegates more than 30% were women, more than 13% youth (under 30) and more than 46% laypeople. Leadership by women was prominent as never before. Canada's cultures and concerns made a strong impact on the gathering.

Daily worship services in a large tent drew thousands of people. The celebration of the eucharist according to an order of worship (the Lima liturgy*) reflecting the Faith and Order convergence statements on BEM was a memorable event, as was the night-long vigil to mark the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Churches were requested to respond officially to the BEM document by the end of 1986. The assembly received the fifth report of the WCC-RCC Joint Working Group,* with an outline of future work. In evangelism, wide attention was drawn to Christian witness in the contexts of culture, worship, the poor, children and religious pluralism.

On Christian education, the assembly pressed member churches "to take seriously the ecumenical dimension of learning and include it in all educational activities and programmes". In emphasizing the central importance of language and culture in ecu-

menical education, the assembly urged churches to experiment with alternative forms of communication.

A recommended WCC priority was the engagement of member churches "in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of all creation", whose foundations were "confessing Christ as the life of the world and Christian resistance to the demonic powers of death in racism, sexism, caste oppression, economic exploitation, militarism, violations of human rights, and the misuse of science and technology".

Seventh assembly: "Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation"; Canberra, Australia, 7 to 20 February 1991; 842 delegates, from 317 member churches.

Sections/sub-themes: (1) Giver of life – sustain your creation!, (2) Spirit of truth – set us free!, (3) Spirit of unity – reconcile your people!, (4) Holy Spirit – transform and sanctify us!

Central committee moderator: Aram Keshishian; vice-moderators: Soritua Nababan and Nélida Ritchie; presidium: Anne-Marie Aagaard, Vinton Anderson, Leslie Boseto, Priyanka Mendis, Parthenios of Alexandria, Eunice Santana, Shenouda of Alexandria, Aaron Tolen.

As at Vancouver, delegates from member churches made up only about a fifth of those present in Canberra; other participants included 10 guests from other faiths, about 1500 visitors and over 200 observers from non-member bodies.

In two respects Canberra's theme was a departure from earlier assemblies: its formulation as a prayer and its reference to the Holy Spirit. The theme was at the heart of daily and special worship services, carefully prepared to draw on the rich variety of traditions in the WCC. But frequent remarks in assembly sessions showed that while the pneumatological emphasis opens up new perspectives in relating theology and experience, it can also kindle controversy. Many argued the need for discernment and for maintaining the link between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

War in the Gulf broke out just three weeks before the assembly began. Discussion about a statement on the war revealed the deep differences within the WCC over classic questions about the justifiability of war. The way the Gulf war overshadowed consideration of other situations of conflict and oppression in the world highlighted growing tension within the ecumenical family between global and local concerns.

The venue gave a high profile to indigenous people, especially Aboriginal Australians. An assembly statement committed the WCC to support and monitor "a treaty process" between Aborigines and the Australian government, and called on churches to "return land unjustly taken" from the Aborigines.

Despite significant ecumenical theological convergence in recent years, assembly discussions and worship made clear that eucharist, ordained ministry and views about the nature of the church remained painful stumbling blocks to full communion. An open letter from Orthodox participants insisted that the WCC's main aim must be restoration of church unity, and asked that faith and order be given greater prominence. But obstacles to unity were also manifest in pleas that certain groups must be better represented within WCC structures. In particular, member church delegations fell considerably short of the target of 20% youth. Even more than at previous assemblies, trying to achieve all mandated "balances" on governing bodies led to sometimes bitter debate.

Christians from mainland China attended a WCC assembly for the first time in over 30 years, and the China Christian Council (seen as a united church in the process of formation, rather than as a council of churches) was one of seven churches welcomed as new members. Another milestone was the presence of observers from the (white) Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (NGK), a first since it left the council in the 1960s.

Eighth assembly: "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope"; Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-14 December 1998; 966 delegates, from 336 member churches.

Hearings, phase I, based on four programme units from Canberra to Harare: unity and renewal; churches in mission – health, education, witness; justice, peace and creation; sharing and service; work of the general secretariat, including church and ecumenical relations, inter-religious relations, communication, the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and Finance.

Hearings, phase II, themes and issues: unity, justice and peace, moving together, learning, witness, and solidarity.

Central committee moderator: Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia; vice-moderators: Marion S. Best and Sophia O.A. Adinyira; Presidium: Agnes Abuom, Kathryn Bannister, Jabez Bryce, Chrysostomos of Ephesus, Moon Kyu Kang, Federico J. Pagura, Eberhardt Renz, Zakka I Iwas Mar Ignatius.

Harare was the 50th anniversary assembly of the WCC. For almost two weeks, delegates reflected about where the WCC member churches had been together and how that history might shape the future. They were helped to do this through a policy statement, "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches", commended by the central committee. In light of all this, delegates made decisions to chart the course of ecumenical life through the WCC into the 21st century. They concluded with a "Journey to Jubilee" recalling fifty years of life together, followed by a service of recommitment.

The assembly, the largest in WCC history with about 5000 attendees, included 966 voting delegates: 367 women, 599 men - 525 of whom were ordained - and 134 youth; 46 guests attended, including eight people from other faiths and a four-member delegation from North Korean churches, the first time churches from that country had been present. The Roman Catholic Church was represented by 23 delegated observers. This was the second assembly held on the African continent. Even the most staid attendees found themselves moving to the African rhythms during worship, and sights, sounds and tastes of Africa infused the event. A Shona stone spirit sculpture interpreting the assembly theme became the unofficial logo. One plenary focused on the

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daunting challenges faced by Zimbabwe and many countries in the region – large numbers of people infected by the AIDS virus, high unemployment, weakening currency and escalating inflation, corruption among government leaders, political disquiet. This information became a backdrop for assembly actions concerning child soldiers, thirdworld debt, human rights and globalization.

Harare also marked the conclusion of the Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women, calling attention to the impact of violence "on women and children who are the innocent victims of war, conflict situations and domestic violence".

A totally new feature was the padare, which means "meeting place" in the Shona tradition. The WCC borrowed this concept, and provided over four hundred spaces for sharing and reflection about sometimes-tender topics that were not necessarily on the official assembly agenda.

Roiling under the surface were a number of doctrinal and ecclesial concerns raised at the Canberra assembly by Orthodox churches – concerns shared by some other WCC member churches as well. The issues were addressed forthrightly by the moderator and the general secretary in their reports, and a Special Commission was created to deal systemically with issues that had been articulated by the Orthodox during a May 1998 consultation in Salonika. These actions helped defuse some tensions.

This was an assembly that reflected a more seasoned, mature, chastened ecumenical movement, still clear (at least in the official texts) on the goal of visible Christian unity, but sobered by the challenges and reminded of the churches' dependence on God in the face of them.

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** Assembly reports, WCC ** H.E. Fey ed., The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement, vol. 2: 1948-1968, London, SPCK, 1970, for extensive bibliographies on the first six assemblies of the WCC.