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## UPPSALA 1968: The World Council's Fourth Assembly

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## UPPSALA 1968

### *The World Council's Fourth Assembly\**

The next major event in this decisive decade of ecumenical conciliar history will be the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala, Sweden, July 4-20, 1968.

The WCC was inaugurated at Amsterdam in 1948, held its Second Assembly at Evanston, Illinois in 1954, and its Third Assembly at New Delhi in 1961. The Fourth Assembly promises to be *the most representative Christian assembly ever to have gathered in one place in the history of the Christian Church*. The 800 officially-appointed voting delegates of the 232 member churches on the Council will represent approximately 400 million Protestants, Orthodox, Anglican and Old Catholic Christians from more than 80 countries. This accounts for 90 percent of the non-Roman Christians in the world. "More than 100 of the delegates will come from Asia, and over 80 from Africa, but only about twenty from Latin America; some forty will be from Australasia, while Europe will send over 300 and North America over 180; some 25 will be specially nominated mission specialists."<sup>1</sup> In addition, without note, there will be 165 advisers and consultants, 150 youth delegates, 85 fraternal delegates representing other world Christian bodies or national councils of churches, 65 observers from non-member churches, and 65 special guests, the total number of expected official participants being 1330. Every effort is being made to see that the laity and women are well represented. There will also be a large number of WCC staff, a maximum of 750 accredited representatives of the press, and, of course, a great number of visitors.

The Assembly will take place in the University city of Uppsala (70 km. north of Stockholm, the capital), at the invitation of the Swedish Ecumenical Council. The main sessions of the Assembly will be held in the newly erected Sports Hall of Uppsala, while Assembly worship will be held in the ancient Lutheran Cathedral of Uppsala, seat of Swedish archbishops for centuries (and burial place of Nathan Soderblom, ecumenical pioneer in the Life and Work Movement). Various auditoriums at the University of Uppsala will be used for Committee rooms and Section meetings. All Assembly par-

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\* This lecture was delivered originally in a Convocation at Central Philippine University College of Theology, Iloilo City, January 26, 1968.

<sup>1</sup> Victor E. W. Hayward, "The World Council's Fourth Assembly," *The Ecumenical Review*, XIX, 1 (1967), 52.

ticipants will be accommodated in University student rooms in two areas of the city. Assembly sessions will be conducted in five languages, with simultaneous translation similar to that at the United Nations.

#### THE THEME

The Fourth Assembly will take as its theme, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). This great promise of Christ will be explored in seven Bible study sessions at the Assembly under the following titles: *The Promise of the New* (Jer. 31:31-34), *The New Breaks In* (Luke 5:18-26 and 7:18-23), *The Scandal of the New* (Luke 23:35-49), *The New Humanity* (Romans 5:12-21), *The Discipline of the New Life* (Romans 6:3-14), (Matt. 5:3-16), *Renewal in and Beyond History* (Romans 8:18-27), and *The Celebration of the New* (Psalm 96, Rev. 21).<sup>2</sup>

The work of the Assembly will be done in Plenary Sessions, in Sections and in Committees. The Assembly will be divided into six Sections to discuss the fundamental concerns of the churches in the contemporary world, whereas an array of Assembly committees will deal in greater detail with the policies to be followed by the various departments of the WCC itself, particularly in the period between the Fourth and Fifth Assemblies.

The six Sections will deal with the following issues in relation to the main theme:

**Section I—*The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church.***

The relationship of Faith and Order concerns to the increasing unification of the secular world.

**Section II—*Renewal in Mission.***

A redefinition of mission and a rethinking of missionary structures and strategy in terms of "Witness in Six Continents."

**Section III—*World Economic and Social Development.***

The role and responsibility of the churches for achieving social righteousness and welfare in contemporary society.

**Section IV—*Towards Justice and Peace in International Affairs.***

The Christian responsibility in modern social change, particularly with regard to revolution.

**Section V—*The Worship of God in a Secular Age.***

The difficulties of modern secular man as regards under-

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<sup>2</sup> The seven Bible studies are outlined in the pre-Assembly booklet *All Things New* (Geneva: WCC, 1967).

standing and experiencing the transcendent, both in private and public devotion.

#### Section VI—*Towards a New Style of Living*

The implications of the major issues at the Assembly for everyday living, for personal attitudes and decisions, of individual Christian men and women, and particularly for youth.

Each Section will involve more than 200 people and for some meetings the Sections will be sub-divided into smaller groups, in order to give delegates the maximum opportunity for participation in the discussions. The Sections will make recommendations to the Assembly for actions to be taken.

#### PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

As was the case with earlier World Council Assemblies, the Fourth Assembly will attempt to do too much in too short a time. There will be only 13 working days at the Assembly, since the first day will be taken up largely with organization and opening, there are no working sessions on the two Sundays, and the Assembly actually ends on the 19th followed by a meeting of the newly elected Central Committee (120 members) on the 20th. The six Sections will each meet about eleven times for 75-90 minutes, and the subjects for discussion, as outlined above, are so vast and complex as to make it difficult for much creative accomplishment at the Assembly. The result will likely be that the Sections will rely very heavily on the working documents drafted for them by the WCC Commissions prior to the Assembly, rather than produce statements of their own.

There is also the problem that with the increasing institutionalization of the ecumenical movement, leadership has been transferred from the type of free and prophetic individuals who were instrumental in the early development of the movement into the hands of denominational officials and spokesmen who tend to be more cautious and conservative. Anyone familiar with the beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement knows that it started in large measure outside the regular structures of the existing churches under the leadership of men and women who were not generally part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Laymen and students provided much of the early leadership and initiative (for example, John R. Mott and W. A. Visser 't Hooft). Today, when anyone over 35 is suspect to the student generation the average age of the delegates of the churches to Uppsala will undoubtedly be over 50. Furthermore, judging from past Assemblies, the proportion of laymen at Uppsala will probably not exceed 17 percent. "And the figure is not likely to be higher," says one observer in Geneva, "so long as denominational appointments are made by clerics.

The only solution I can see is to make the Assemblies bicameral, with a house of clerics and a house of laymen."<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, there will also be 165 advisers invited to the Assembly because of their special knowledge and competence, and membership in the Commissions and Committees of the Council—where a major part of the creative thinking and planning takes place between Assemblies—is not restricted to the official delegates to the Assembly. In this way, persons of particular competence may be included in the work of the Assembly and the Council, even though they are not persons of major status and responsibility within their respective churches. As pointed out by Dr. Henry P. Van Dusen, the WCC must deliberately seek to maintain a creative tension between the prophetic and priestly elements by providing for equal participation and equal influence for both.<sup>4</sup>

The Fourth Assembly will differ markedly from the Third Assembly. The New Delhi Assembly accomplished a "colossal consolidation of Christian forces" through "the massive merger of the World Council with the great bulk of those Orthodox and Protestant bodies which still remained separate from it and the enlargement of the WCC in scope and function through its integration with the International Missionary Council."<sup>5</sup> The editor of *The Christian Century* described this as "an achievement worthy of comparison with the great moments in the history of the church."<sup>6</sup>

The Third Assembly also expanded the Basis of the WCC to emphasize its trinitarian character and to direct attention to the authority of the Scriptures, so that the Basis now reads:

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But whereas the Third Assembly was primarily centripetal in its achievements, the Fourth Assembly will be centrifugal—more world oriented—in its agenda.<sup>7</sup> Anglican Bishop Ian Ramsey of Durham, writing in the *London Times* about the plans for Uppsala, says, "The

<sup>3</sup> Harold E. Fey, "World Council and World," *The Christian Century*, September 13, 1967, p. 1152.

<sup>4</sup> *One Great Ground of Hope* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 108 *et passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Kyle Haselden, "New Delhi 1961," *The Christian Century*, January 10, 1962, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

assembly agenda is the result of a realization that if we wish to re-discover a meaning for theology, to give theology a rebirth, we best start with the world, its hopes, and its problem."<sup>8</sup> *The Christian Century* editors maintain that "What Uppsala is proposing to do is to give theology a chance to root itself in the concerns of the world, to establish an empirical place in the happenings of our time... What Uppsala is to probe for is a reconception of theology in the womb of the world... Uppsala is to seek out a new agenda for theology, a new literacy which will give the church and its people a new vocabulary... The accent is to be on life-theology, rather than a 'living theology'... Uppsala makes the world its agenda."<sup>9</sup>

While the promise of this bold theological approach to the art of living is being heralded with enthusiasm in many quarters, it has also come under critical attack from the conservative Protestant journal *Christianity Today*. In an article entitled "Pre-thinking Uppsala" this journal complains that "what is surprisingly absent in the agenda is any clear proposal for the consideration of matters historically regarded as 'theological'—the being and nature of God, the incarnation of our lord and his saving mission in the days of his flesh, the doctrine of grace, and so on. Are these doctrinal questions no longer meaningful?... The thesis seems to be that if we are to recover a meaning for theology, we must begin with man's world, man's problem's, man's hopes. It is, then, a vital question whether Uppsala will seek to elaborate a global form of culture-religion that derives its 'theology' from secular and humanistic sources and interprets its 'hope' in merely temporal and one-layered terms."<sup>10</sup>

In response to the criticism, Bishop Ramsey, already quoted above, says that the plans for Uppsala suggest that theologians need to have a fresh vision of the mission of theology, to be more concerned as theologians with

Secular hopes and despairs, until the point is reached where God discloses himself, not as a conversation stopper but in order to fulfill the one and to redeem the other. It is at such a point that the significance of theology, which to many seems pointless and irrelevant, will dawn on us. The agenda for Uppsala points the way to a new literacy in theology rather than to escape from theology, still less from God. Here is a way of resuscitating not a dead God, but a dead theology, for those who are doing this are well aware that God is still very much alive.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in "Singing a New Song at Uppsala," *The Christian Century*, September 20, 1967, p. 1179.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1180-1181.

<sup>10</sup> *Christianity Today*, September 15, 1967, p. 1221.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *The Christian Century*, September 20, 1967, p. 1180.

## ANNIVERSARY WITH CHANGE

Participants at Uppsala will be conscious that this Assembly marks the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948. They will also be very much aware of a number of significant changes that have taken place in the life of the Council.

The most obvious change will be the new General Secretary. This will be the first Assembly at which Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, the venerable Dutch lay theologian who guided the WCC from its inception, will not be present as General Secretary. Upon the retirement of Dr. Visser 't Hooft in 1966, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., was elected to the office of General Secretary. In response to his election, Dr. Blake said, "I promise to gauge the success of the World Council of Churches in these coming years not primarily by organizational standards such as size, efficiency or stability, but rather by the extent to which under its auspices the truly inspired and theological able frontier leaders of all our churches are encouraged and enabled to know each other and to assist the churches to become visibly the Church of Jesus Christ, witnessing faithfully and effectively to Him in and for the world." In his call to the Fourth Assembly, Dr. Blake said, "It is our hope and prayer that the Assembly at Uppsala... will be used by God to enlighten, empower, and renew His whole Church—through our common worship, our common study of the Bible, and our common wrestling with man's most important questions and concerns. And this, not just for our own sakes, but as a token of God's purpose and promise ultimately to renew His whole creation."

Another change has been the steady growth in the membership of the Council and in the corresponding size of the Assemblies. "At Amsterdam 351 delegates represented 147 churches; at Evanston the numbers had increased to 502 delegates from 160 member churches, and at New Delhi to 577 delegates from 181 churches."<sup>12</sup> Now at Uppsala there will be 800 delegates from 232 member churches.

Likewise this will be the first Assembly where the Orthodox churches will be fully represented, and nobody professes to know precisely how they will use their strength. But it is clear that their voices will be heard and their influence will be felt at all points. It will also be the first Assembly to feel the full impact of the integrated presence of the International Missionary Council which now operates as the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC.

Of special interest at Uppsala will be the presence and participation of 15 observers from the Roman Catholic Church. For the first time they will be entitled to address the Assembly and it has been reported that Roman Catholic participation may even "affect

<sup>12</sup> Hayward, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

the makeup of the new central committee" which governs the WCC between Assemblies.<sup>13</sup> There is every indication that collaboration between Geneva and Rome will be intensified and that formal ties of some sort may soon emerge.

#### PHILIPPINE PARTICIPATION

Only two churches in the Philippines are members of the World Council of Churches: the Philippine Independent Church and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. Ten seats at the Fourth Assembly have been allocated to the Philippine Independent Church (the largest single delegation from Asia), and two seats to the United Church of Christ. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines will be entitled to one fraternal delegate. The Philippine Episcopal Church and The Methodist Church are related to the WCC through their respective parent churches in the U.S.A. and may thereby have their representatives included. For instance, Dra. Patrocinio Ocampo, who is dean of the Graduate School of Philippine Christian College and president of the World Federation of Methodist Women, will be included in the delegation of The Methodist Church from the U.S.A. to Uppsala.

#### CONCLUSION

Two final observations as we look toward the Uppsala Assembly. One is that so-called Younger Churches of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania will surely play a larger and more decisive role here than at any previous ecumenical assembly. The confidence and maturity of their voices and views will certainly register a profound influence on the Assembly and affect the direction and decisions of the Council in the days ahead.

And, lastly, the road to Uppsala will almost certainly be easier than the road from Uppsala. The task of the ecumenical movement is not getting any easier. In fact, one might say that the honeymoon is over and the hard realities of living together and going forward in unity are upon us. The radical implications of this in all their worldly complexity comprise the agenda for the Fourth Assembly. In the words of one observer, "We can be sure that Uppsala will be no holiday... and post-Uppsala will be a picnic only for anti-ecumenical forces. All things considered, the faint-hearted had better stay away and bargain-hunters looking for 'cheap grace' had better look somewhere else."<sup>14</sup> However, for all those who take seriously the promises of our Lord, the trip both to and from Uppsala will be "a pilgrimage of expectation."

<sup>13</sup> *Time*, September 1, 1967, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Harold E. Fey, "Letter from Geneva," *The Christian Century*, August 9, 1967, p. 1015.

*Let us pray.*

O God, Whose matchless power is ever new and ever young, Who didst create all things by Thy Word and art redeeming them through the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Thy Son, pour out Thy Spirit upon Thy Church, that with renewed faith, vision and obedience we may the more joyfully testify to Thy new creation in Christ, more selflessly serve Thy new order amidst the old, and more hopefully await the new heavens and the new earth of Thy promise, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

GERALD H. ANDERSON