

Education and the World Council of Churches - an overview from its origins to the 1968 Uppsala Assembly

In this section the focus is only on ecumenical education and learning in the development and history of the World Council of Churches. The purpose is to explore the explicit and implicit understandings of and attitudes towards education rather than describe all educational activities in detail. It is not the purpose to give an account of all the other issues and programmes which, on the whole, have already been well documented.

Beginnings to Amsterdam

Chapters in different volumes of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (Vol 1 1517-1948 and Vol 2 1948-1968) draw remarkably similar conclusions. In the Epilogue to the period 1517-1948, Stephen Charles Neill wrote:

The movement is still too much an affair of leaders in the Church, of ministers rather than lay folk, and of those who can afford the time to go to conferences rather than those who must stay at home. This again is doubtless inevitable at the start; ideas begin with the few, and a long time must be allowed for the dissemination of those ideas to the mass.¹

In his overview chapter of the period 1948-68, W A Visser 't Hooft concluded:

The ecumenical movement is not sufficiently rooted in the life of the local congregations. In spite of all attempts made to educate church members for participation in the ecumenical enterprise, the movement is still too much an army with many generals and officers, but with too few soldiers. It would seem that not enough has been done to show that the ecumenical concern is not to be conceived as one of the many concerns in which a local congregation may take interest, but as a concern which arises out of the very nature of the Church. It is clear that real advance towards full unity will be made only, if in coming years, local congregations and their members discover that to follow Christ means to follow him in his work of building the one Body, his Body.²

These statements are revealing as much of a particular attitude towards ecumenical education or learning as of the failure of the ecumenical movement to become a popular movement. In the first, a process is envisaged whereby the ecumenical learning of the few is passed down to the many. This was a process that was expected to be effective over a long period of time. In the second, it is seen that the twenty years that have passed have not resulted in church members who have been educated for participation. The phraseology 'education for participation' rather than, say, participative education or education through participation is significant.

In both cases the diagnosis was probably correct that the people of the churches were not being ecumenically engaged and transformed. However, the response to this by a top-down dissemination-reception model of education requires further examination today. It is no criticism of the writers that they held the educational views of their time. It may be a matter of concern

¹ ed Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Volume 1 1517-1948, SPCK, London and Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1954, p730

² ed Harold E Fey, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Volume 2 1948-1968, SPCK, London and Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1970 p26

that such views still dominate educational practice, if not theory, in the ecumenical movement. The persistence of such a view of education can be seen as the story of the World Council of Churches unfolds.

There is another trend which can also be observed. That is to disregard the significance of education and learning as primary to the World Council of Churches. In his *The World Council of Churches –A Study of its Background and History*³, David P Gaines gives an illustration of the tendency to make education in the ecumenical movement invisible - a tendency is shared by other accounts of ecumenical history. Neither volume of the official *History of the Ecumenical Movement* referred to above has a section on education and references to it are sparse. Only in the third volume for 1968-98 (yet to be published) is there a chapter on education.

Gaines has a preliminary section to the account of the formation of the World Council of Churches. He quite correctly has 160 pages outlining the developments in the Missionary, the Life and Work and the Faith and Order movements. However there are only fleeting references to the development of the Sunday School/Christian Education movement or to the movements with a strong educational component – the Student Christian Movement, YMCA and YWCA.

In this period, the Student Christian Movements (SCMs) in the different countries could be described as a breeding grounds for ecumenism. From early on in their history they espoused the cause of Christian unity. The SCMs were probably more of a popular movement than the ecumenical movement as a whole as they were thoroughly participatory and organised by students for students. Commenting on SCMs in *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth Work in the World Council of Churches*, Ans J van der Bent said that they, "helped generations of students to understand and experience a quality of Christian discipleship and to grow in a profound awareness of the oikumene in Christ"⁴. He remarked that SCMs enjoyed a freedom denied to more institutionalised organisations. This begs the question as to why the ecumenical movement went in the direction of hierarchical institutionalism. Perhaps it was because the ecumenical movement never began as or became a popular movement. This question lies outside the scope of this study but it is interesting as the SCMs were one of, if not the principal, generators of leadership in the ecumenical movement.

Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, was involved with the Geneva YMCA. In correspondence with YMCAs in other parts of the world, he stressed the need to "propagate that ecumenical spirit which transcends nationality and language, denominations and ecclesiastical questions, class and profession."

³ David P Gaines, *The World Council of Churches –A Study of its Background and History*, Richard R Smith Co, New Hampshire, 1966

⁴ Ans J van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth Work in the World Council of Churches*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986 px

The movements represented by the SCM, YWCA and YMCA, although collaborative with the World Council of Churches down the years, were never incorporated into the World Council of Churches. The decline of the SCMs and the directions of development of the YWCA and the YMCA meant that participants in the ecumenical movement could no longer build on the kind of ecumenical experience and learning originally offered through participation in these movements.

It is often forgotten that Sunday Schools began in England in the late eighteenth century as a social response to the behaviour of children on their one day each week free of employment, rather than as a Christian nurture initiative. The first Sunday Schools were not related to churches but established by people of goodwill on an interdenominational basis. A Sunday School movement developed and spread from England to many parts of the world. Local, national and global associations of Sunday Schools were formed in the nineteenth century drawing in an increasing variety of representation of traditions. The movement was lay-led from its beginning and came under deep suspicion and resistance from some in the churches. J Blaine Fister, former Executive Director of the Division of Education and Ministry of the NCCC, USA wrote from his context:

... we are impressed with the dedication and zeal of the early pioneers of the movement, most of them lay persons, who persevered often in the face of ecclesiastical opposition.... These early pioneers worked for the "cause" without serious regard for denominational affiliation. The early Sunday Schools were called "un-denominational" or "non-denominational". The non-denominational nature of early Sunday School work made it a natural for the formation of Sunday School Associations on an interdenominational basis. These Sunday School associations became the forerunners of the conciliar movement in the United States. The councils of churches, or present day ecumenical agencies, grew out of the early Sunday School associations.⁵

Philip Cliff, a British historian of the Sunday School movement, makes a similar comment:

...the first tentative steps towards future Church Unity were being taken as the delegates to World Sunday School Conventions encountered other churches. They learned to trust one another, even though they were different in church order, or emphasised different aspects of doctrine. These early ecumenical encounters laid the foundations for meetings which later became starting points for the International Missionary Council, the Faith and Order Commission, the Life and Work Movement, all of which are now included in the World Council of Churches.⁶

As both Gaines and the *History of the Ecumenical Movement* were published prior to the merger of the World Council on Christian Education (successor of the World Sunday School Association) with the World Council of Churches, there may be some excuse for not identifying

⁵ Fister, J Blaine, "Christian Education: Potential and Promise in the Ecumenical Movement", *Mid-Stream Vol XIX, No 1*, Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ, Greenfield, Ind, 1980) p59

⁶ Philip B Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980*, NCEC, Redhill, 1986

education as the fourth stream which flows into the World Council of Churches. However, as suggested above, it is indicative of the invisibility of education in the ecumenical movement. Being invisible implies being actually present but not noticed. This chapter aims to make visible the actual presence and significance of learning or education in the World Council of Churches over its history.

The establishment of the World Council of Churches, as an organisation, was planned by a committee of seven representatives each of the Life and Work movement and the Faith and Order Movement which met first in 1937. A preliminary advisory conference was organised in Utrecht in May 1938 to which representatives of the churches and of ecumenical bodies were invited. Among these was a member of the International Council of Religious Education. This body was a member of the World Sunday School Association, serving the USA and Canada. There were also representatives of the world bodies for the YMCA and the YWCA. Amongst the more numerous voices from Life and Work and Faith and Order there was at least the presence of someone to speak for Christian education.

The conference produced a draft constitution for what was to become the World Council of Churches setting out the following as the fourth Function of the new body “To promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the members of all the churches”. This Function was adopted verbatim in the founding Constitution of the World Council of Churches at the first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948⁷. This Function still remains, albeit in a slightly modified form, in the current constitution as the fourth of the Purposes and Functions: “nurture the growth of ecumenical consciousness through processes of education and a vision of life in community rooted in each particular cultural context”⁸. That change makes explicit what was implicit in the original, that a primary task of the World Council of Churches is one of educating or nurturing an ecumenical consciousness. It also places education firmly in the realm of changing attitudes, relationships and understanding rather than only as an agent of passing on an ecumenical history and tradition.

The Utrecht conference established a Provisional Committee which would have brought the formation of the World Council of Churches to immediate fruition, had the second world war not intervened. Before the outbreak of war, a General Secretary, Dr Willem Visser't Hooft, had been appointed and the beginnings of an administration set up in Geneva.

In April 1947, the Provisional Committee met in the USA. The General Secretary reported⁹ a time of extraordinary expansion in the work of the WCC in the previous year. Amongst the new work mentioned was the founding of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey near Geneva. The Ecumenical Institute was to become a specialist strand of the World Council's engagement in

⁷ ed Visser 't Hooft, *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Harper and Brother, New York, 1949 p197

⁸ World Council of Churches, *Yearbook 2003*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2003 p60

⁹ World Council of Churches, *Minutes and Reports of the Provisional Committee, Buck Hill Falls, USA 1947*

education. In commenting on the overall expansion, Visser't Hooft expressed the fear that the World Council's activities might "grow faster than the degree of ecumenical awareness and understanding in the churches" and that consequently education was required that was not "merely propaganda about the World Council's activities but the presentation of a new dynamic vision of the Church"¹⁰. It is not clear, however, whether he saw education as an instrument of bringing the ecumenical movement up to the pace of the World Council or as enlivening the ecumenical movement to drive the World Council and the other ecumenical instruments. This is a dichotomy which keeps on emerging in relation to the World Council's perception of the role of education.

To that meeting was brought a "Statement of Policy for the Youth Department". Its primary task was "to help the churches and in particular the youth organisations of the churches in giving to their youth a sense of participation in and responsibility to the Church Universal as it finds its provisional expression in the ecumenical movement"¹¹. The Provisional Committee noted that the World Council was being encouraged to extend its work into other areas, one of which was Christian Education. It was felt that new tasks should not be taken on board until the existing work had been well established. They recognised, however, that consideration would have to be given to the relationship of the World Council with the World Sunday School Association, YMCA, YWCA and the World Student Christian Federation. They had been involved, together with the World Council's Youth Department, in the World Youth Conferences in Amsterdam 1939 and Oslo 1947. In particular, the World Sunday School Association had direct relationships with the youth and children's work of the churches.

Amsterdam to Evanston

The World Council of Churches was constituted at its first Assembly in August 1948 in Amsterdam. The invitation to the churches observed that "Our first and deepest need is not a new organisation but the renewal, or rather the rebirth of the actual churches"¹². Renewal may have become a dominant theme for the following years in the World Council of Churches but the role and methodologies of education in that never seem to have been fully enough recognised or explored.

In an address to the Assembly, Visser't Hooft reflected on the unexpectedly long period of its interim existence. "The process of formation proved to be a formative process ... We have learned much about the dimensions of our task ... We have looked into abysses of ignorance and indifference which are to be bridged ... up to mountains of misunderstanding which have to be removed ... Our patience with each other ... in learning to live and work together must reflect

¹⁰ *ibid* p47

¹¹ *ibid* p73

¹² quoted in ed Harold E Fey, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Volume 2 1948-1968*, SPCK, London and Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1970 p9

something of God's¹³." In one sense, there is nothing remarkable about Visser't Hooft's comments. One might say the same about any process of forming an organisation. However, it gives a clue that the World Council of Churches being an organisation which is predicated on the difference between its members coming together for common purpose must always be about learning.

The Message of the Amsterdam Assembly used the language of learning and teaching, again emphasising the perhaps under-analysed educational essence of the World Council. The following illustrates the point:

Our coming together to form a World Council of Churches will be vain unless Christians and Christian congregations everywhere commit themselves to the Lord of the Church in a new effort to seek together, where they live, to be His witnesses and servants among their neighbours. We have to remind ourselves and all men that God has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble and meek. We have to learn afresh together to speak boldly in Christ's name both to those in power and to the people, to oppose terror, cruelty and race discrimination, to stand by the outcast, the prisoner and the refugee. 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 to say 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 though he were an irresponsible thing or a 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 new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.¹⁴

Apart from any overt educational activities or programmes, engagement in the World Council is itself a learning experience.

As well as the implicit references to education at the Amsterdam Assembly, two of the reports were more explicit. The report of the committee on "The Significance of the Laity in the Church" noted:

while in some churches the laity are being used to a considerable extent, and some training provided, every church ought to be deeply dissatisfied with the present situation. The laity are there, and are waiting to become effective as members of the Church. It is at present incumbent upon the churches to make it clear to the laity that they have an essential place in the life and tasks of the Church. The lay members of the church, however, are conscious of the fact that they are largely ill-equipped ... The laity requires

¹³ ed Visser 't Hooft, *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Harper and Brother, New York, 1949 p28ff

¹⁴ *ibid* p10

strengthening through biblical and theological study and discussion with special reference to bearing of Christian faith upon daily life. This will include the study of “Christian stewardship” which means nothing less than faith in action. Without such a theological understanding of stewardship, it may easily descend into a well meaning activism. ... Laymen’s retreats have proved of especial benefit, for it is not simply a question of more adequate training, or even of a new approach. It implies the age-old necessity of a complete commitment personal commitment on the part of every member to Christ and His Church.¹⁵

The Youth Delegation reported on “Youth and the Assembly”:

We are concerned about the general lack of Biblical preaching and teaching in the churches ... We feel strongly that the way to finding new means of coming together as churches is not only through Faith and Order conversations, but most emphatically through corporate evangelistic endeavours. We need not so much ecumenical understanding as ecumenical obedience ... we believe that the family is the first training-ground in mutual responsibility and understanding, and for the transcendent values of life ... we are persuaded that the present educational method with its pre-occupation with objective research and efficiency has failed to teach standards of values and to encourage responsible thought.¹⁶

Whilst recognising the need for appropriate education and training for the laity and young people to play their part as Christians in the life of the church and the world, neither of these really picks up on the need to promote the growth of an ecumenical consciousness. It might be that this was so obvious in the heightened ecumenical awareness of the first Assembly that it did not need stating explicitly. It should also be recognised that the current ecumenical context may make one more sensitive to the need for the intentional development of an ecumenical consciousness.

In its interim period of existence, the World Council of Churches had established a Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid. The initial purpose had been to repair church buildings damaged in the war and to provide material relief for the people. The need for a renewal of church life was also recognised. Many churches had been isolated by the war and were also unable to maintain their institutions of theological education. The still continuing Scholarships programme began by enabling students to train for ministry in operational institutions outside their own countries. As conditions normalised there was a shift in emphasis to offering opportunities for supplementary theological education for ministers who could then share their experience of study abroad with their congregations. Some were placed in theological institutions of denominations other than their own to an ecumenical dimension to their learning experience. Whilst that would be presumed today, it was a significant development for the time.

The Ecumenical Institute, Bossey had been founded in 1946 in a location a few miles away from Geneva with a relationship with the University of Geneva. In 1948 it became a department of the World Council of Churches. The primary task of the Ecumenical Institute was to help lay

¹⁵ *ibid* p153ff

¹⁶ *ibid* p185ff

people to understand and equip themselves for their Christian vocation - "It is urgent that the churches awaken to the need for making men and women feel at home in the Church in a technological age and to discover the meaning of the gospel in their daily lives."¹⁷ A variety of learning opportunities were offered relating to different issues and of different duration. Members of the same profession (eg lawyers, artists, industrialists) were enabled to consider their Christian vocation together. Those professionals who could contribute to the pastoral care and mission of the churches were brought together. Opportunities were created for dialogue between Christian leaders and sociologists, philosophers and experts in development. There were seminars on Biblical study and moral issues. The Director of the Institute reported that:

It is gratifying that, with hardly any exception, the students leave Bossey with a sense of having caught a new vision of the significance and essential oneness of the Church and with a deep conviction that the concrete contact with a centre of ecumenical thought and action has changed their whole outlook and conception of being a member of the Christian Church.¹⁸

The Ecumenical Institute's Graduate School was started in 1952 with the purpose of helping participants to gain a knowledge of and insight into the ecumenical movement - its background, goals and problems. It was to prepare them to become effective ecumenical workers in their own context. By its nature, the Graduate School was and remains an academic course which focuses on a study of the ecumenical movement in various aspects. In terms of current educational analysis it is based more on transmission than transformation. However, this is offset by the experience of living and relating within an international ecumenical community.

Both the more informal and formal education offered by the Ecumenical Institute has been conceptually different from the educational work of the World Council of Churches as a whole. To put it simply, Bossey is an educational institution which offers learning opportunities to participants who attend. However, the World Council of Churches should be experienced in itself as a learning opportunity and has used its staff to promote, encourage and enable ecumenical learning within the churches and the ecumenical movement.

The Ecumenical Institute cannot but feature in any account of education in the World Council of Churches. The study and encounter experienced there has had a profound effect on those who have participated in its learning opportunities. However, the particularity and specificity of its role and work have also to be recognised. The story of the Ecumenical Institute has been the subject of much research and documentation whereas the educational role and activity of the World Council of Churches as a whole has not been given the same attention.

Following the Amsterdam Assembly, the purpose of the World Council of Churches Study Department was seen as helping the churches "find Christian answers to the fundamental issues

¹⁷ WCC Central Committee Minutes, Toronto, 1950 p39

¹⁸ *ibid* p110

of the Church's relation to the world"¹⁹. At the same time a special committee had been formed to follow up the concerns of the report "The Significance of the Laity in the Church" presented to the Amsterdam Assembly, as referred to above. A traditional understanding that the laity should be educated in such virtues as honesty and fair dealing was extended to a broader social application to the conditions of work and to the spirituality and Christian witness of work. Lay academies and associations were emerging in the regions and, like the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, taking up these issues. Both the Study Department and the Committee for Laymen's Work believed that "progress in Christian social action depended on the enlistment and education of the laity"²⁰

Several documents on different aspects of Christian action in society and the nature of a responsible society were produced and sent to the churches but the Study Department had to report its concern to the Central Committee that the response from the churches was limited. The question was raised whether the churches were really concerned about ecumenical study:

...it is an undeniable fact that the member churches, on the whole, show a disquieting apathy and unconcern regarding this part of their common enterprise.

True, there is today a large amount of spontaneous interpretation and cross-fertilization as from church to church, and from country to country. It is also true that an increasing number of individuals and groups are awakening to the significance of ecumenical study, and sharing it. But it remains a constantly vexing problem how to make ecumenical perspectives and issues a living ferment within the *regular* activities and processes of the churches. The ecumenical "conversion" of the churches has not yet gone deep enough to make them ready to pool their forces in *concerted* attacks on confronting problems. Nor do they possess adequate machinery for effectively participating in ecumenical study, and for translating its eventual results into terms of new policies and programs²¹

The problem appears to have been seen as that of the churches in their lack of motivation and mechanisms for serious involvement in ecumenical study ie engagement with the documentation produced through the agency of the World Council of Churches. This kind of analysis is still evoked today to explain the lack of 'reception' by the churches of reports produced by the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies. The particular example is recorded to indicate that this emerged very early on in the history of the World Council of Churches. To note all such instances of this analysis from that time up to the present would be tedious and add nothing and so only a few representative instances will be reported.

Although this will be dealt with later, the educational significance of this needs to be noted. The emphasis has been so heavily on the content and outcomes of studies that the process of

¹⁹ WCC Central Committee Minutes, Chichester, 1949 p69

²⁰ David P Gaines, *The World Council of Churches –A Study of its Background and History*, Richard R Smith Co, New Hampshire, 1966 p511

²¹ WCC Central Committee Minutes, Rolle, 1951 pp97ff

engaging the churches and their members has been neglected. They are expected to receive, which is only a very limited form of engagement. Perhaps the 'ecumenical conversion' desired in the extract from the Central Committee minutes above would be more probable with an active participation in processes rather than being given the end products.

As has been noted above, a concern for young people and young adults, both being encompassed by the term 'youth' in the World Council of Churches, had been present from the beginning. The Youth Department of the World Council of Churches had a responsibility to be a point of ecumenical contact and inspiration and to enable collaboration and interaction. The committee which guided this work included representatives of the International Missionary Council and the World Council for Christian Education. As well as organising conferences and meetings, the Youth Department took on responsibility the work camp programme. In the context of a Europe which had been physically and psychologically damaged by war, groups of twenty to thirty young people from different nationalities were brought together to undertake clearance and reconstruction tasks. The work camp programme then expanded across three continents. The physical tasks were of benefit but perhaps more so was the ecumenical learning:

The work camps sponsored by the World Council of Churches provide opportunities for young people to participate practically in the ecumenical movement. The life of the camp itself, international and inter-confessional, involving work, worship, Bible-study, discussion and relations with the local community, is in itself a miniature ecumenical encounter. The projects chosen all relate to some concern of the World Council of Churches-for refugees, for the evangelism of industrial workers, for the strengthening of the Church's ecumenical life and witness. Young people who have taken part in such camps go back to their home communities with a new awareness of the task of the Church in the world, and the eagerness to translate it into local terms.²²

From 1953 the Youth Departments of the World Council of Churches and the World Council for Christian Education ran a joint programme. Work camps were renamed as World Youth Projects with the following objective:

That in a truly ecumenical exchange all give to one another what each is able to give; that giving should, therefore, in every case, be a mutual exchange of resources; that the resources should include those of money, leadership, literature, correspondence, prayer; that the object of this interchange be primarily the strengthening of the ecumenical conscience and co-operative work of youth in the nations concerned.²³

The power of bringing together participants from different nations and Christian traditions into a small community which engages with the wider community in a particular context and which builds in space for reflection and experiential learning from and with one another is clearly seen

²² World Council of Churches, *The First Six Years 1948-1954: a report of the Central Committee*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1954 p46

²³ *ibid* p51

in this model of ecumenical learning. It was seen too in the activity and learning which took place through the YMCA, YWCA and Student Christian Movement. It is a model with many similarities to that adopted by the Courses of Lay Leadership Training (CLLTs) run today by the networks of lay educational institutions.

Representatives of the churches gathered in Evanston, USA for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in August 1954 with the theme 'Christ - The Hope of the World'. The Message of the Assembly stated "We enter now upon a second stage. To stay together is not enough. We must go forward. As we learn more of our unity in Christ, it becomes the more intolerable that we should be divided."²⁴. Participation in the World Council of Churches is noted again as a learning experience.

The Report of Section II 'Evangelism - The Mission of the Church to Those Outside Her Life' is more specific about the educational task. In a sub-section concerning 'Exploring Frontiers' the following comments are made:

B. The Witnessing Laity

The laity stand at the very outposts of the Kingdom of God. They are the missionaries of Christ in every secular sphere. Theirs is the task to carry the message of the Church into every area of life, to be informed and courageous witnesses to the will of our Lord in the world. To this end they will need training and guidance. Such training involves instruction in the content of the Christian faith and the significance of that faith for obedience and witness in the different contexts of lay life. This kind of training will require the services both of ministers and of experienced laymen.

C. Christian Education

One of the most important areas of evangelism is that of childhood and youth. Every new generation requires the fresh presentation of the gospel, Among the most important methods of Christian nurture are Sunday schools, youth programmes, Bible fellowships, discussion groups and, most of all, Christian training in the home.

.....

G. A Trained Ministry

Because of its importance in the life of the Church, serious thought should be given to a more realistic training of the ministry, including provision for the service of theological students in industry and agriculture, and the addition of social studies and field work to the curriculum.²⁵

These comments were echoed in a similar vein in the Report of Section VI 'The Laity - The Christian and His Vocation'²⁶

²⁴ World Council of Churches, *Evanston Speaks: Reports from the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, SCM Press, London for the World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1955 p10

²⁵ *ibid* pp36ff

²⁶ *ibid* pp113f

It may have been taken as read or not thought to be relevant but there is no reference to an ecumenical dimension in the kinds of education and training advocated. It would have been possible for churches to respond to this plea for education entirely within their own systems. Perhaps the Assembly delegates saw the World Council of Churches as a service agency for the churches by advocating good practice rather than an active promoter of ecumenism. An instructional understanding of education is also evident. These concerns were partially addressed later on in the Assembly, as will be seen below.

The recommendations from the Assembly Committee on the Division of Studies would raise today some questions about a model of working that, as has already been remarked, uses 'experts' to produce reports which are then disseminated as more or less finished products to the churches for reception. Although the Assembly Committee on the Division of Studies did recommend a greater co-ordination and an organic relationship between the studies being undertaken through the Division and the teaching offered at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey. There are, however, some specific references in the list of proposed projects which deserve mention.

The International Missionary Council, which had not yet merged with the World Council of Churches, had a longstanding concern for the training of ministers drawn from the local populations where churches had been established. It was first expressed at their meeting in 1938 in Tambaram, India where it was observed that theological education was the weakest element in Christian mission. This was much later to result in the formation of the Fund for Theological Education whose successor programme, Ecumenical Theological Education, remains a key component of the educational work of the World Council of Churches. In the area of 'Training for the Ministry' the World Council of Churches Assembly Committee on the Division of Studies proposed:

A long-range enquiry to be conducted in conjunction with the enquiry undertaken by the International Missionary Council in selected younger church areas. An important aspect of such study would be the furtherance of an ecumenical outlook in theological education.²⁷

This recognition of the need to promote an ecumenical dimension to theological education was significant but was often subsequently sidelined by other issues concerning viability.

The other proposed project to be mentioned here is that of 'The Mission of the Church to Workers':

Combining study and pioneering experimentation, the project would include:

- (a) A series of case studies on
 - (i) Approaches actually used in evangelism among workers;
 - (ii) The religious assumptions and convictions of workers, and their attitude to Christianity;

²⁷ World Council of Churches, *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954*, SCM, London, 1955 p308

- (b) An information bulletin carrying regular reporting of experiments, projects and studies in this field, which would give a sense of fellowship in common endeavour.²⁸

This is one of the first official commendations of an action research and learning project which takes experience and practice seriously. Unfortunately this kind of approach was not suggested for the study project on 'An Ecumenical Approach to the Interpretation of the Bible' or the various Faith and Order projects and might still not be today.

After the Assembly four departments were being grouped together in a Division of Ecumenical Action - the Ecumenical Institute; the Youth Department; the Department on Work for the Laity; the Department on the Co-operation of Men and Women in Church and Society. This grouping brought together several aspects of the educational work of the World Council of Churches.

In the light of the discussions in the Sections, the Assembly Committee on the Division of Ecumenical Action reflected on the work of the new Division. In their Report, they were able to be more specific about ecumenical education in their recommendations. Significant selected items have been grouped together from the Report.²⁹

General

- The member churches should be reminded that ecumenical education is not one particular activity within the life of a church but concerns the life of the Church in all its activities, including preaching and teaching on major doctrines.
- Make better use of delegates to ecumenical conferences, and of visitors of other churches, for the ecumenical education of their membership especially at the local level.
- Consider the possibility of an investigation by the World Council in co-operation with the WCCE and other interest bodies of means of assisting churches in providing ecumenical education for boys and girls under eighteen.
- Respond to the widespread and serious demands from the churches for help in study and action concerning family life.

The Ecumenical Institute

- Continue to provide many courses and conferences of great value in developing ecumenical consciousness among members of churches.
- Encouraging and financing the enrolment of selected mature students in the Graduate School.
- Make an early study of the possibility that regional institutes on parallel lines should be brought into existence, so that church members in all parts of the world may have the opportunity to share in consultations, conferences, and courses of the type now available at Bossey.

The Youth Department

²⁸ *ibid* p309

²⁹ *ibid* pp226-233

- Churches and mission boards should be asked to give earnest consideration to the development of new patterns of ecumenical youth work in different parts of the world.

Department on Work for the Laity

- The addition to the aim (of the Department) of the words "to foster ecumenical understanding among the laity".

These comments may appear to be substantial and valuable, as indeed they are as they appear here. However, in the context of the *Evanston Report*, let alone the total activity of the Assembly, they are heavily overshadowed by business which is given greater prominence and importance. It could be said that a movement ought to place great value and emphasis on process, in which there would be a significant role for education. However, it seems always to have been the case that the institution of the World Council of Churches prefers 'serious content'.

A great deal of attention has been paid to the formation of the World Council of Churches and its first six years of official existence. Reaching the Evanston Assembly is a good place to pause and take stock of issues that have been noted in relation to education and the World Council of Churches. The following observations can be made:

- The ecumenical movement and the emerging and developing World Council of Churches were seen as a learning experience by their very nature.
- Education was not given a great deal of recognition as a begetter of the ecumenical movement or prominence for its capacity to actualise that learning.
- The need for the engagement of all in the churches was acknowledged but processes were not adopted which would enable ecumenism to be built on local experience.
- The participatory and common ownership style of the very effective breeding grounds for ecumenical activists of movements such as SCM, YWCA and YMCA was not adopted elsewhere.
- Although the development of an ecumenical consciousness was recognised as necessary, the dominant model of education was the transmission of the products of the few to the many with the presumption of an instructional methodology.
- Heavyweight issues and concerns which were content related dominated the story and self-understanding of the World Council of Churches to the detriment of the process related concerns of ecumenical education.

Evanston to New Delhi

In the period after the Evanston Assembly, the World Council of Churches engaged in many areas of investigation and reflection. Within these was a great potential for learning, about themselves as well as others. The Chairman of the study being undertaken on the Bible commented to the 1955 meeting of Central Committee:

The exchange of thoughts crossing the borders of nationalities and denominations not only shakes the ideas we have about others, but at the same time .. sets free the deepest

values of our own spiritual heritage, of which we sometimes are not aware if we remain imprisoned in our own circles.³⁰

The 1958 meeting of the Central Committee in Nyborg Strand, Denmark was devoted to consideration of a long list of reports on this activity, inter alia: Christians and the Prevention of War in an Atomic Age; The Lordship of Jesus Christ over the World and the Church; The Theology of Evangelism; The Place and Use of the Bible in the Life and Activities of the Churches; The World of God and the Living Faiths of Men; The Christian Concern in Economic and Social Developments; Our Common Christian Responsibility towards Areas of Rapid Social Change. It is not the purpose of this study to analyse the content or value of this impressive volume of work but to examine a different aspect.

Behind all this there was an understanding that new insights would be produced through the participation of the churches in the study processes. However, the reality of this participation was problematic. Gaines comments:

In any case, the pulpit and the pew would have to be helped to advance with the World Council, or it would not get far on the way to its goal ... (Some) wished the people of the churches at large to have opportunity to make their contribution and endeavoured to bring them into the study process.

To this end, reports of important discussions in the Central Committee were made available to them through denominational offices and other channels, for reading and criticising. Such attempts at much-talked about 'grass-roots' education revealed, however, that it was a long way from Geneva to the local parishes, and that when this distance had been negotiated the problem of getting an informed response still remained unsolved. It called for means of two-way communication, largely nonexistent, and for instruction, for which there were not enough interested and competent teachers. The task would be long-discouragingly so and time would not be less fleeting for the fact that it was the Lord's work. There had been encouragement, as observed, in the readiness at the local level since Evanston to listen and even to ask for information; but this was augury more for the longer future and eased but little the immediate frustration.³¹

The Department of Information saw its role as "to tell the truth simply, graphically, and as fast as our new mass communications systems demand"³². The attempt to popularise and simplify the ecumenical information communicated were the matter of debate. Yet it appears to have been the case that the members of the member churches remained largely unaware of the activities of the World Council of Churches and their outcomes. They were unable to engage with or relate to the information they did receive. Gaines again reflects on this:

³⁰ World Council of Churches, Minutes of Central Committee, Davos Platz, 1955 p29

³¹ David P Gaines, *The World Council of Churches –A Study of its Background and History*, Richard R Smith Co, New Hampshire, 1966 p733

³² World Council of Churches, Minutes of Central Committee, St Andrews, 1960 p150

The frank discussion of them in the vernacular would have helped to bridge the distance between the World Council of Churches and its much talked-of 'grass-roots' constituency.... the Council had published its findings ... but mostly in learned treatises, which reached the eyes of few besides the scholars, and in minutes of meetings where they were reduced to sentences which, out of the context, were, to the uninitiated, often more confusing than enlightening. ... the World Council would have been well advised to broaden the purview of its communications to make room for truly ecumenical education for the millions in its churches who remained uninformed and in the dark as to what it was doing and saying as their spiritual monitor about the pressing religious and moral issues of the day.³³

Within those Divisions and Departments not directly related to education, the report to the New Delhi Assembly on the Rapid Social Change Study 1955-60 in the Department of Church and Society confirmed the pervasive understanding of education remarked on earlier:

The study has directed attention to the urgent need for a wide scale programme of education and action in all the churches. Such a programme would call for the use of the reports of the study and the various surveys which have been made, to inform the individual church members about the meaning of their witness in relation to the problems of social change.³⁴

As long as education was seen as 'informing' church members what they should be doing and what it means, it is not surprising that such programmes found it hard to engage people.

Taking up the proposal from the Evanston Assembly, the 1955 Central Committee in Davos Platz launched an inquiry into theological education. Information was collected from around the world and a joint consultation organised with the World Student Christian Federation, which was already involved in such a study. The resulting proposal, agreed by the 1957 Central Committee, was for a five year study on 'Theological Education and the Training of the Ministry'. There were to be three areas of consideration: the function of theological education and its relationship to the church and its mission; the basic elements of theological education and their inter-relationship; the significance of the ecumenical movement to theological education. This latter point was to include whether the theological education curriculum should include ecumenics as a distinct discipline or whether the ecumenical movement should provide a general perspective - a discussion which still continues.

In the same period, the 1958 meeting of the International Missionary Council established the Theological Education Fund with the purpose of promoting theological excellence and develop indigenous theological education. It was to encourage churches in the South to share in responsibility for decision making about ministerial training. Sharing in responsibility was a step forward, encouraging the taking of responsibility would only come much later. In an article in

³³ op cit p979

³⁴ WCC, Evanston to New Delhi, Report of the Central Committee, WCC, Geneva, 1961 p52

the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, John Pobee, a former staff member responsible for the successor Ecumenical Theological Education programme, summarises the purpose of the Fund:

The three marks of TEF's work were *quality*, combining intellectual rigour, spiritual maturity and commitment; *authenticity*, involving critical encounter with each cultural context in the design, content and purpose of theological education; and *creativity*, leading to new approaches and deepening the churches' understanding and obedience in mission.³⁵

For all the admirable sentiments expressed, especially considering its temporal context, theological education in many, if not most, places of the world has not thrown off the dead hand of a traditional western view of proper academic processes and quality.

By the time of the New Delhi Assembly in 1961, the Division of Studies had still not been able to commence the agreed study on Theological Education and the Training of the Ministry through lack of funds. A proposal was, therefore, brought to the Assembly for a programme of consultations on that theme to be jointly organised with the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey. It was noted that, although some studies and actions had been undertaken by the International Missionary Council:

.. there is little contact among those who are engaged in these efforts, and there is as yet little discussion of the meaning which concepts of the unity and mission of the Church, current in ecumenical circles, may have for theological education.... It is of importance that people who are interested in attempts to rethink theological education and the training of the ministry, especially from the viewpoint of the unity, mission and renewal of the Church, be provided with an opportunity to establish contact with one another, to consider the meaning of their work in an ecumenical setting and to study together questions which arise as the disciplines of theological education are viewed from an ecumenical perspective.³⁶

It was recognised that the proposal for these consultations was modest compared to the original major study. One may wonder why, at the time when the new Theological Education Fund of the International Missionary Council was receiving financial support, there was none available for the study.

In the Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees the Scholarships programme had moved on from being an emergency measure to a permanent element of ecumenical development. In 1960, it was agreed that the programme would be extended to non-theological students. Whatever the subject of study, the principal had been clearly established that these scholarships also offered an ecumenical experience.

³⁵ Pobee S, *Education* in Lossky et al, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2002 p387

³⁶ WCC, *Work Book for the Assembly Committees*, WCC, Geneva, 1961 p73

The 'ministry of the laity' had been constantly affirmed within the ecumenical movement. This generally indicated an understanding that the laity were participating in the life of the world in a way which the institutional church and her clergy were not. This gave the laity a special role in communicating the gospel and in the total mission of the church. However, it appears to have been difficult to move the discussion on from the roles of the laity in church structures as office holders or more general participants. Whether in the church or the wider world, representatives of the laity articulated concern about their unpreparedness for these ministries. Lay participants at the Evanston Assembly had expressed disquiet that the reports were written in a kind of theological language that they found difficult to understand. As Hans-Reudi Weber, the responsible staff member of the Department of Laity, pointed out to the 1958 Central Committee, this had implications for the education of theologians and ministers as well as laity. The Department had been exploring what could be learnt from developments in the churches.

Special attention has been given so far (1958) to the so-called pioneering experiments at the frontier between the Church and the world. Lay training centres, certain experimental parishes, brotherhoods and bridge-heads [are] signs of renewal, because they attempt to renew church-life in the view of its mission. . .

What the Department on the Laity stands for is the renewal of the total life and mission of the Church. The Department will, therefore, continue to keep in contact with these prophetic signs of renewal, but at the same time work for a closer contact with parish life, men's, women's and youth movements, and other organs of the normal instituted churches.

What is most needed today for the renewal to break through is a twoway conversation between the persons involved in the prophetic signs and the responsible leaders of the "normal" church-life.³⁷

What the Department appears to have found almost impossible to do was to translate all of this into something which caught the imagination and engaged church members in their local contexts.

As well as relating to the global ecumenical networks and creating conference opportunities, the Youth Department had continued to promote Ecumenical Youth Camps. From being entirely based within Europe, many had now also been held in Asia, Africa and Latin America. By 1961, there had been 10,000 participants from over 60 countries in 387 camps located in 47 countries. This was an impressive contribution to international understanding and ecumenical formation.

The question is often asked, "what makes these camps specifically ecumenical, and why are they part of the programme of the World Council of Churches?" Experience has shown that the peculiar genius of the ecumenical work camps lies in the fact that (i) they are an occasion for young people of different confessional backgrounds to live, work and worship together for some four weeks, and thus to experience the common life in the Body of Christ, and to become aware of their responsibility to work for the unity and renewal of their own churches;

³⁷ WCC, Minutes of the Central Committee 1958, p106

- (ii) they help the campers through work and worship to understand anew their calling as 'fellow workers for God' and to gain a clearer conception of the relevance of their faith to their everyday life ;
- (iii) they enable young people to be confronted with the social, economic and political issues with which the community in which the camp is held has to wrestle, as well as in their own country, and to do so in an ecumenical context and with the guidance of statements and studies produced in the World Council of Churches;
- (iv) they are a training ground for the ecumenical encounter which the campers must enter in their home countries and communities.³⁸

The potential for ecumenical learning was now more overtly recognised. The emphasis had shifted from a focus on what the camps could achieve for the situations they served to an equal regard of the ecumenical benefit for the participants.

However, set against this positive achievement was a trend towards confessional youth work in the churches. The Workbook for the World Council of Churches Assembly in 1961 asked delegates to reflect on this and advise the Youth Department on how to respond.

The post-war tendency for churches to take more direct responsibility for their youth work continues to grow in all parts of the world. The ecumenical movement has encouraged this development as a means of helping youth to take the Church seriously as the worshipping and witnessing community. This whole line of development appears to facilitate the fuller incorporation of young people into the separate churches. In many instances the result is a strongly confessional youth movement with young people themselves holding varying degrees of initiative. The tendency then is for conditions to be stipulated for participation in inter-confessional programmes and for closer supervision of youth's participation in ecumenical events.³⁹

Increasing denominationalism has been more recently identified as a challenge for ecumenical education but it seems that it is a long standing problem. It is ironic that the work of the World Council of Churches in valuing and encouraging the participation of young people in the churches should have had this end result. There has been a constant tension for the World Council of Churches between being a service agency to and for the churches and being an ecumenical pioneer which questions and challenges the churches.

The Ecumenical Institute continued its wide ranging programme of study groups, consultations for different professions and conferences on particular issues as well as the Graduate School. In this period, it took seriously its mission of creating space learning through encounter and interaction as is evidenced from its report to Central Committee.

The distinctive character of the Institute, . . . derives from the fact that it is a continuing institution, where people live together in a fellowship, and in which the aspect of ecumenical education which derives from experience, rather than the acquisition of information, has a major place. This experience includes not only personal contact and

³⁸ WCC, Evanston to New Delhi: Report of the Central Committee, WCC, Geneva 1961 p96

³⁹ WCC, Work Book for the Third Assembly, WCC, Geneva, 1961, p118

intellectual exchange with people of other confessions and nationalities, but also the riches and tensions of ecumenical worship and an element of personal re-commitment and spiritual renewal.⁴⁰

It is this aspect, rather than any formal teaching on ecumenics, which symbolises the distinctive contribution of the Ecumenical Institute.

The Division of Ecumenical Action, which included the work on laity, youth, and the Ecumenical Institute, had been given the responsibility by the Evanston Assembly of helping the churches relate ecumenical thinking to Christian education in all its aspects. This was discussed several times in the Divisional Committee who reported back to the New Delhi Assembly:

the conclusion that the training of candidates for the ordained ministry is of capital importance for the "Ecumenical Education" of church members, and that an ecumenical reorientation of the traditional systems of training in the different churches is needed rather than the addition of 'ecumenics' as an additional subject.

They noted the many other agencies already active in this area, including other World Council of Churches Divisions and the Ecumenical Institute, and concluded:

The Committee of the Division of Ecumenical Action decided in the light of this information that for the time being priority ought to be given to other responsibilities.... There may well be a case in the near future for a Division of the World Council to take other initiatives in this field, but so far the exact nature of such initiatives (which must complement and not duplicate what is being done by other agencies) has not become sufficiently clear, nor have adequate resources been available for initiatives commensurate with the needs.⁴¹

For many the purpose of the Division of Ecumenical Action had been ambiguous. For some it was supposed to be about promoting ecumenical activities and fellowship among the member churches, for others about ecumenical education and yet others about the renewal of the churches and their mission. The Divisional Committee proposed a new aim to the New Delhi Assembly:

The aim of the Division shall be to serve the churches by stimulating the growth of ecumenical understanding and commitment, by relating ecumenical knowledge and experience to all aspects of the life of the churches, by creating opportunities for active ecumenical encounter and by other means which may help the churches in process of renewal to manifest unity and to fulfil their common missionary calling.⁴²

A new statement of the functions of the Division was also outlined. These included:

- (ii) To help member churches to promote increasing participation by local congregations in the life of the ecumenical movement.
- (iv) To help the churches to relate ecumenical thinking to Christian concern for education in all its aspects.

⁴⁰ WCC, Minutes of Central Committee 1955, p109

⁴¹ WCC, Evanston to New Delhi: Report of the Central Committee, WCC, Geneva, pp107

⁴² WCC, Work Book for the Third Assembly, WCC, Geneva, p104

- (v) To encourage and serve as a clearing-house for experiments and new methods of ecumenical education and consultation.⁴³

The sentiments of the aim and functions of the Division were very encouraging from the point of view of the significance of ecumenical education. However, it is clear from the questions raised to the Assembly in the Work Book that they were not offered accompanied by any breakthrough in thinking or practice or, indeed, with real hope that the World Council or its member churches would prioritise ecumenical education as compared to the 'heavyweight' issues.

When these came to the New Delhi Assembly, small but significant changes were made to the aim in the course of discussion in Committee. Whilst the Divisional Committee making the proposals had worked through the issues over several years, this Assembly Committee had a matter of days without its members necessarily having any background knowledge or experience. Their proposed aim read:

The aim of the Division shall be to serve the churches by relating ecumenical knowledge and experience to all aspects of the life of the churches, and by stimulating the growth of ecumenical understanding and commitment through personal contact and other means which may help the churches in process of renewal to fulfil their common calling to witness and service and so to manifest unity.⁴⁴

'Ecumenical knowledge' (ie that produced by studies, consultations etc) now came first and 'ecumenical understanding' moved to a less prominent position. That this appears to be the reassertion of a particular understanding is reinforced by the interpretation placed on their proposal for a simplified set of functions for the Division of Ecumenical Action. In their Report, they offer a differentiation between 'ecumenical education', 'Christian education' and 'education in general' which purported to be drawn from the guidance given them from the Division which is set out in the Work Book. Ecumenical education, therefore, was:

information about the history and present expressions of the ecumenical movement and education for personal participation in ecumenical responsibilities for witness service and unity.⁴⁵

However, the Work Book itself contrasted the dissemination of information about the activities of the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement and the opportunity for involvement (the role of the Department of Information with an understanding of ecumenical education which was broader in every aspect (the responsibility of the Division of Ecumenical Action)).⁴⁶

It was recommended that Christian education should have a ecumenical dimension and that the churches should work together in producing material and developing their understanding of teaching the gospel:

⁴³ *ibid* pp105ff

⁴⁴ WCC, *The New Delhi Report*, WCC, Geneva, 1961 p198

⁴⁵ *ibid* p198f

⁴⁶ *op cit* p106

It is vital for Christian education as a whole that our churches should take seriously the obligation to work out in terms of Sunday School curricula, catechetical instruction and other forms of Christian education, substantial material which enables young people and adults to understand and appreciate the ecumenical movement and prepares them to share in it.⁴⁷

The Youth Department was encouraged to help the churches develop catechetical and Christian education material which was relevant to young people and encouraged ecumenical growth. To further these concerns, it was recommended that, as well as continuing the work with bodies such as the YMCAs, YWCAs and World Student Christian Federation, conversations should be opened with the World Council of Christian Education “regarding the possibility of closer and more general relationships with the World Council of Churches in the field of Christian education”⁴⁸. In an Appendix to the Assembly Report there is a Memorandum for the incoming Central Committee on developing this relationship.

The saga of the Study of Theological Education and the Training of the Ministry continued at the Assembly. The watered down proposal was rejected in favour of a full study very much along the lines originally envisaged:

‘How can the work of ministry be performed and new patterns of ministry be recognized and utilized in the new situations in the modern world and what modifications in the traditional academic curricula and methods of practical training are called for in order to meet the challenge of changing times?’ A study of this question clearly raises both sociological and theological problems concerning the ministry, and therefore of the method and content of training and education for it.⁴⁹

One vital question which was not raised in the Assembly Report for consideration in the study was ‘How can the churches develop theological education together which results in an ecumenically formed ministry and ecumenically minded churches?’ Such a possibility was already in the practice of the Scholarships programme. It is surprising, therefore, that it was not explicitly stated.

Two important items of advice were given to the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey. One related to the interpretation of the Orthodox communion to the others and vice versa. The other concerned the addition of a three month period of practical experience to the Graduate School. This would have to be related to the whole programme of the Graduate School. In order to offer integrated ecumenical education, there should be a two week period where students brought the experiences of the course and the placement together. This was a significant educational insight.

The Section Reports contained references to the need for educational opportunities to be created. In Witness, there was a call for lay people to be 'trained' so that they could communicate the

⁴⁷ WCC, The New Delhi Report, WCC, Geneva, 1961 p199

⁴⁸ *ibid* p200

⁴⁹ WCC, The New Delhi Report, WCC, Geneva, 1961 p169

gospel in their own contexts.⁵⁰ There was an implication that they should learn no more than necessary. This was perhaps not surprising as it appears to have been clergy who had most to say about the cooption of lay people into 'their' roles in the churches and ecumenical movement. In Unity, it was recognised that:

The educative function of the World Council of Churches is indispensable and needs extension. Most members of churches know little of the beliefs and practices of churches other than those of their own communion or tradition.⁵¹

It could be observed that even the latter would not necessarily be the case today. However, the word of interest for present purposes is 'educative'. Whether or not this was a significant choice as against, say, 'educational', it again betrays a particular attitude. What seems to be implied here is a process of information rather than education.

More generally, the Policy Reference Committee, referring to the Report of the Chairman of Central Committee, stated:

The Report states, 'The ecumenical movement no longer is, if it ever was, the affair of a coterie of specialists'. While agreeing with the substance of this statement, the Committee feels that perhaps the gravest problem facing the Council is that of familiarizing the general membership of our churches with the details and significance of its work. Many delegates to this Assembly are themselves hearing of much of this work for the first time; while the majority of our church membership is either totally ignorant thereof or is indifferent or occasionally hostile towards it. To help the member churches to follow the Lund advice that churches should habitually all be doing everything together that they are not bound to do separately, the Committee recommends that the Assembly instruct the Central Committee to make this problem one of its major concerns during the next inter-Assembly period.⁵²

The Assembly was dealing with a large theme, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, it was reflecting on its own nature and revised its Basis, it was the point at which the International Missionary Council merged with the World Council of Churches and it had weighty issues on its agenda. There was much to celebrate about the World Council of Churches but yet again came the recognition of a disconnect between the World Council and the people who constituted its member churches. The World Council of Churches was in itself an educational and transformative experience but only for the comparatively few.

New Delhi to Uppsala

The basic pattern of working in the Divisions and Departments of the World Council of Churches continued after the New Delhi Assembly and much the same comments could be made. Attention will only be drawn to particular developments. By the end of the period, it is

⁵⁰ *ibid* p87

⁵¹ *ibid* p130

⁵² *ibid* p145

possible to detect some developments in thinking but many of the problems remained. Thus the Division of Ecumenical Action reported to the Uppsala Assembly in 1968:

... a measure of success in drawing larger and larger numbers of people into the ecumenical atmosphere and of fostering ecumenical attitudes among them. The task of the Division has been to make the ecumenical vision more widely seen, more deeply experienced and more faithfully obeyed. On the other hand, ... the slow pace of ecumenical advance on the part of the organized churches today increasingly finds expression in movements that seek to bypass the structures of the Church or rail against them with outright calumny. Many have lost the ardour of their first love; others are complacent about the ecumenical progress so far achieved and want to institutionalize it; yet others are lost in a whirl of meetings which have little more than a torrential output of words to show for their labours.⁵³

The language of 'fostering ecumenical attitudes' and of 'ecumenical vision' is more prominent, as opposed to the transmission of knowledge from Geneva. At the same time, there is a recognition of a dispiriting reality.

The Theological Education Fund had paid particular attention to the development of seminaries for mission through its grants. There was also the development of a Textbooks Programme which encouraged the publication of contextual resources by local ecumenical committees. Around 325 volumes were published in the period.

The Ecumenical Institute, Bossey had attracted an average of 500 people per year to its various offerings. The report to the Assembly differentiated its activities from the kind of unity represented by church union negotiations:

rather a unity which is experienced as one studies the way in which the Church can preach as One Church and how it can be of service in the modern world.⁵⁴

This emphasis was evident in the kind of courses and seminars in the programme for each year.

If much continued as before, there were two noteworthy pieces of work relating to education being undertaken in the World Council of Churches – the Study on Patterns of Ministry and Theological Education and the Joint Study Commission on Education.

Study on Patterns of Ministry and Theological Education

As noted above, the New Delhi Assembly requested the Division of Studies to conduct this study. The Report submitted to the Uppsala Assembly 1968 was based on the following questions:

- 1) How can the work of ministry be performed and new patterns of ministry be recognised and utilized in new situations of the modern world?

⁵³ WCC, New Delhi to Uppsala: Report of the Central Committee, WCC, Geneva, 1968 p81

⁵⁴ *ibid* p107

2) What modifications in the traditional academic curricula and methods of practical training are called for in order to meet the challenge of changing times?⁵⁵

The Study was undertaken through regional consultations and study groups the results of which were brought together in a final consultation in London in 1967.

The Study saw that:

Theological Education must be seen as more than just 'training for the ordained ministry.' This function, indeed, is only one part of the total educational responsibility of the Church: to enable all and every member of the Church to go as far as possible in response to God's mission in Christ. Current distinctions between 'Christian Education' and 'Theological Education,' between 'Ministerial Training' and 'Laity Formation,' may have their practical value; they cannot, in the last resort, be theologically justified. This study is specifically concerned with the theological education of church leaders, including ministers and clergy, but it is important to stress at the start the wholeness of theological education.⁵⁶

The Report identified three aspects of a traditional understanding of theological education for ministers and pastors - academic education; practical training; spiritual formation. However, three alternative strands were proposed:

- 1) The pursuit of truth with an enquiring mind and the honest facing of honest questions. Theology is not merely to be regarded as information and instruction, but as a process of exploration and rediscovery. It includes openness to what God is saying in the turmoil of contemporary events. It includes search for the truth in dialogue with non-Christians. A necessary pre-supposition is an existential commitment to search for the truth with rigour and discipline, and with integrity of mind.
- 2) The apprehension of the meaning of the Gospel as it is experienced in the confessing communities of the Church which responds to Christ. Theology here is understood as that understanding of God's work and mission which goes with 'spiritual formation' of the individual Christian, and the building up of the Body of Christ. This element in theological education demands some kind of participation in a committed community.
- 3) The vocational or functional formation of candidates for leadership roles and specialized ministries. These are likely to become more diversified in the future.⁵⁷

The report recommended the co-ordination of theological education for ministers and laity. There was no reason why they should not learn in the same institutions. Theology ought to be studied in dialogue with the contemporary world.

There is only one paragraph in the Report relating to ecumenical theological education, a lack of emphasis which is notable.

⁵⁵ WCC, Work Book for Assembly Committees, WCC, Geneva, 1968, p126f

⁵⁶ *ibid* p129

⁵⁷ *ibid* p129

Ecumenical education, in which teachers and students of different church traditions join in the common task, is an instrument of great value in the actual processes of theological thinking and learning. Denominational schools and church programmes should take steps to plan for a co-ordinated or united theological education, while providing at the same time for any special confessional instruction of training that their churches require.⁵⁸

Much recommended in the report was radical for its time and, in many places, yet to be practiced eg thoroughly contextual; thematic approach (as opposed to traditional theological disciplines); relating to diverse ministries; involvement in social structures; student centred; learning cooperation. Others were more to be expected eg academic standards; learning in theological community, especially in worship; personal spiritual development. There were additional recommendations about future involvement with the Roman Catholic Church on theological education. What is missing is any aspect of either learning about ecumenism or learning to be ecumenical.

However, Stephen Mackie, who was full-time secretary for the Study, had something more positive to say ecumenically in his book *Patterns of Ministry: Theological Education in a Changing World* written out of the process. Reflecting on their understanding of theology, he wrote:

It is ecumenical; theological education must therefore be in an ecumenical context. It is far laymen as well as for ministers. There is a strong case therefore for their studying theology together.⁵⁹

He recognised that although university theological education can be ecumenical:

Something more positive is required; something which the universities very often are not able to provide. If it is to be provided, if that solid and demanding ecumenical education is to take place which is the only hope for the continued life and growth of the Ecumenical Movement, then it is the churches that must provide it. How is this to be done? What ecumenical structures are required in the field of theological education? What place in these structures should be given to the existing denominational theological colleges? For in the present situation it is the separate denominational schools that must justify their continued existence, and not the new ecumenical structures that are beginning to emerge. It no longer makes any sense for a school to attempt to teach theology 'ecumenically', if only one denomination is represented among its students. If the churches are committed to an ecumenical approach, to do together what does not need to be done separately, then theological education is clearly one of the most important things which must be done together.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ ibid p130

⁵⁹ Mackie S, *Patterns of Ministry: Theological Education in a Changing World*, Collins, London, 1969, p75

⁶⁰ ibid p99

It is much to be regretted, yet probably inevitable that such a clear and challenging statement did not appear in the Report as presented to the Uppsala Assembly. Perhaps it was only an individual who would dare to draw such conclusions from the Study. Four essential points emerge:

- (1) It was the churches who should take responsibility for creating ecumenical contexts for theological education.
- (2) Ecumenical theological institutions should be part of the accepted order and denominational schools seen as anomalous.
- (3) Ecumensism can only be learnt ecumenically.
- (4) Of all the things churches should do together, theological education is significant.

Mackie drew other important conclusions from the study relating to developing an integrated curriculum, inductive learning, team teaching and learning in the local community but none so important as those above.

Joint Study Commission on Education

In the same period, The world Council of Churches and the World Council of Christian Education were together conducted a study on education more generally. This was also reported to the Uppsala Assembly. Although both this study and that on theological education both touch on some similar issues, it does not appear that there was any significant engagement between the two study processes. They were conducted in different parts of The World Council of Churches and discussed in different committees at the Assembly.

From the outset, it should be noted that the Joint Study Commission involved ecumenical reflection on education rather than reflection on ecumenical education. Although their report will be outlined, it does not offer as much insight into ecumenical education per se as might have been anticipated.

Institutional relationships between the World Council of Churches and the World Council of Christian Education developed with first an office of the World Council of Christian Education being established in Geneva in 1963 and then the whole global office in 1966.

Following the encouragement of the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches and the World Council of Christian Education's own concerns, a plan for the Joint Study Commission was agreed by the latter's Assembly in 1962 and the former's Central Committee in 1963. The first Joint Study consultation was held in Berlin in 1964 to consider expert reports about education in various nations and denominations. The findings of the Joint Study Commission were grouped in three sections according to the terms of reference.

The first task of the Joint Study Commission was to:

Consider in the light of the Christian faith the nature and function of education in our changing societies, to examine the nature of the churches' responsibility in and for

education, to work toward the formation of a common theological understanding of education.⁶¹

An explosion in education was noted as a global phenomenon This was accompanied and related to enormous growth in knowledge, technology, population and expectations. Education was no longer seen as confined to the school classroom. There had been significant developments in adult education and training. Information was more widely available through the burgeoning of the mass media. The very size of all of this alone should have demanded the attention of the churches.

However, the Report emphasised a basic Christian concern for education. Teaching and learning has been ever present in the life of the churches - in congregations as well as educational institutions. The family was identified as the earliest educator. The educational provision in many societies originated from the churches. In this we have been encouraged by the scriptures and the example of Jesus. Many schools had come under government control and those church schools remaining were no longer dynamic. The existence of denominational institutions was questioned by ecumenical developments.

Some significant questions were raised which still stand in spirit, if not in phraseology:

Do schools perfect individuals or build community ? Does education improve separate persons or enhance humanity ? Does schooling develop an elite or cultivate a mass national resource? Do students get to have or in order to give? Are men sealed units to be filled and polished, or are they ragged parts being shown the service way to wholeness, to each other ? The distinctions are artificial. Few educators would see them as either/ors. But emphases wander, and priorities here could determine whether the world will long maintain men learning from each other, or give over at last to those endless, ruinous collisions which were troublesome enough in a roomier past but could be fatal in the densely packed future.⁶²

The Report offered statements 'towards' a Christian perspective on education which was:

... the effort to open the mind to the depth dimension of the reality in which human life is set: its aim is to prepare persons for effective, life-long, loving and God-fearing service among men.

What is studied gives clues to activity and educational communities "are the means of discovering the interdependence of God's creatures as co-learners in His world". The educated person is:

one whose eyes and ears, mind and heart have been opened to the surprising richness of surrounding reality; who understands adequately the human society in which he lives and himself in his relation to it; who has acquired skills of learning and acting; who gives service to his fellow men and accepts it from them with grace; who renders his adoration of worship to his Creator.

⁶¹ WCC, Work Book for Assembly Committees, WCC, Geneva, 1968, p166

⁶² *ibid* p169f

However, education cannot:

open for societies an automatic gateway to Utopia or assure success for individuals. Nor does education under church auspices guarantee salvation. The Christian view of education recognizes the thwarting and corrupting presence of evil in individuals and communities.

As hope has been offered in Christ:

education will be directed to enabling new generations to make their own contribution to an on-going human culture and to developing the capacity to live a personal life of self-criticism, flexibility of mind and continual learning in the midst of changing or unstable social patterns. Education will be directed to overcoming the barriers that separate men and the hatred, fear and suspicion that set them against one another by an unsentimental, fearless, never-despairing effort to build new human relationships of hope and love.⁶³

The Joint Study Commission's second task was to:

make recommendations to the two sponsoring bodies on ways of assisting the churches in the fulfillment of their responsibilities in general education and to suggest the priorities to which the organizations should address themselves⁶⁴

This section of the Report noted that the first concern was the student. In terms of access, equality of educational opportunity was emphasised. In terms of content, a broad general education was advocated. Religion should not be excluded either as specific religious education or as a dimension of all subjects. Christians and churches were encouraged to engage in national education debates from a point of commitment and involvement rather than attack from the outside. The role of the teacher had broadened from that of instructor. Churches should play a role in the development of the standards and professionalism of teachers. The Report suggested the need for a code of ethics. Teachers needed the support of the churches to attain:

adequate recognition and a fair hearing in society. Especially this will be in order if teachers concerned for truth, justice and freedom, risk the unpopular opinion, bare the embarrassing fact, challenge the taken-for-granted.⁶⁵

Teachers in the congregation should be seen as:

wondering expectant persons - and not just as convenient help for the Sunday School.⁶⁶

In respect of educational institutions, the Report reflected more on governance than ethos or quality. National governments now dominated educational provision. The churches were encouraged to contribute to the development of education in their nations without regard to who 'owned' the schools.

The third term of reference was to:

Make sample studies of the present practices of the churches in the nurture and training of their members, to ascertain what are the most pressing needs and to suggest how the

⁶³ *ibid* pp171ff

⁶⁴ *ibid* p172

⁶⁵ *ibid* p 176

⁶⁶ *ibid* p176

two organisations might be of assistance to the churches in developing new lines of approach to this task.⁶⁷

The study found a great variety of practices and patterns but there was always an emphasis on learning from the Bible and the traditions and histories of the churches. However, it was recognised that:

The inculcation of facts is not the whole of any education. Certainly it cannot be for Christian education. For the Christian aim is not just the right organization of the right ideas in a mind thus made right, but is the right witness and the right action of a life made right by God.⁶⁸

Both the Eastern tradition in the church of immersion in the liturgy and the Western tradition of instruction were necessary. The significance of the family in shaping the whole person was recognised as were the threats to traditional family structures.

Christian education was described as an 'essential, unavoidable activity' for equipping people as agents of reconciliation, developing maturity in faith and 'rescuing churches from elites'.⁶⁹ Even if Christian education had been effective in the past, it was no longer.

Developments had taken place through the lay academies and work with pre-school children. Youth groups had shown ecumenical enterprise. Also:

Experiments in ecumenical education and in international education - which are two aspects of one enterprise: learning to appreciate differences, value variety, *and* to affirm the other in his difference - give enough promise already to demand new effort.⁷⁰

Unfortunately this sentence is the only substantive reflection on ecumenical education in the Report.

Comparable attention had not been paid to the training of lay leadership as to the training for ordained ministry. Ministers also required training for their educational task. The World Council of Churches and the World Council of Christian Education should act together to promote and develop leadership training in the churches.

The Report also advocated:

the creation of special national education panels within or related to national councils of churches;
a particular focus on young people;
collaboration between theologians, Biblical scholars and behavioural scientists to develop appropriate pedagogical practices.

⁶⁷ *ibid* p 179

⁶⁸ *ibid* p180

⁶⁹ *ibid* p181

⁷⁰ *ibid* p 182

The Joint Study Commission recommended to its parent bodies that they united their organisations and integrated their work. There should be a permanent ecumenical commission on education relating to both general education, to see it in a Christian perspective, and Christian Education, to clarify its aims, content and means.

It is necessary to return to the remark made in introducing the above outline of the work of the Joint Study Commission. There is an essential difference between an ecumenical consideration of education and a consideration of ecumenical education. The Report could be characterised as strong on the former. However, that is not the focus of this research.

At the end of the period under review, it may be helpful to return to some of the comments made after the end of the first six years of formal existence of the World Council of Churches (see p13f)

- The institutionalisation of the global ecumenical movement in the World Council of Churches resulted in fewer, if any, references to these being a learning experience by their very nature.
- It was still the case that the need for the engagement of all in the churches was acknowledged but processes were not adopted which would enable ecumenism to be built on local experience..
- Also that, although the development of an ecumenical consciousness was recognised as necessary, the dominant model of education was the transmission of the products of the few to the many with the presumption of an instructional methodology.
- The substantial work represented in the two reports on theological education and education more generally (also indicating a lack of integration in the work of the World Council of Churches) should be placed in the context the volume of an amazing and often bewildering variety of other reports and activities. It is still arguable that heavyweight issues and concerns which were content related dominated the story and self-understanding of the World Council of Churches to the detriment of the process related concerns of ecumenical education.

