

Alienation, Liberation, Community

The educational policy of the WCC
before and after Nairobi

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I. Education on the agenda between Uppsala and Nairobi

The increasing importance of the role of education in society all over the world, especially since the '60s, has been paralleled by a perceptible increase in the attention devoted by the churches to education in recent years. Even before Uppsala, the World Council of Churches tried to further the process by agreeing to the creation of a Joint Study Commission on Christian Education (1964-1968). The Fourth Assembly at Uppsala (1968) led to the establishment of the Office of Education (1969). Additional weight was given to the issue of education in the ecumenical movement by the decision taken in Lima (1971) by the World Council of Christian Education to merge itself into the educational work of the WCC. The next step was the express decision to raise educational questions before the ecumenical forum as a whole in Nairobi (1975) for the first time in the history of the Assemblies.

In Uppsala, it was noted that "the world was writing the agenda for the meeting", and the Assembly "tried to read the writing, understand it and respond to it in a willingness to accept the necessity for changes as tumultuous for the Church itself as for the rapidly changing world".¹ Consequently, educational themes were included as a result of the opinion expressed in the final report of the Joint Study Commission with its reference to the general "explosion in education... as part... of the explosions in knowledge, in technology, in population, and in expectations".²

Everywhere, public expenditure on education was increasing. Quantitative expansion of educational institutions was rapid. Wider opportunities in

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¹ Cf. NORMAN GOODALL (ed.): *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the WCC*. Geneva: WCC, 1968, p. XVII.

² *Work Book for the Assembly Committees: Prepared for the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, Sweden, 4-19 July 1968*. Geneva: WCC, 1968, p. 166.

pre-school and after-school education were opened to more and more people in more and more age groups. Opinions and attitudes were also subject to the powerful influence of the mass media, press, radio and TV. In view of this phenomenal spread of education, the final report demanded that: "the churches must come to new terms with a cultural institution long familiar but suddenly novel in its size and in its dynamism, and not waiting a minute for the churches' attention, suggestions, or adjustments".³

How did the Office of Education of the WCC in Geneva answer the challenges during the years between Uppsala and Nairobi? The work to be done by the Office had to follow the mandate that had been given to the Division of Ecumenical Action (DEA) to which the Office belonged. It was the spirit of Uppsala that was to shape the activities in subsequent years. This inevitably imposed on them the burden of ecumenical conflict which begins when the truth of the Gospel is actually expounded in a particular way.

The Fourth Assembly at Uppsala had taken sides, refusing neutrality. Nor could educational engagement remain neutral. This grew to one of the leading ideas of the Office of Education (under William B. Kennedy as its director and Paulo Freire) as well as of the whole Division of Ecumenical Action (under Ernst Lange), later the Programme Unit on Education and Renewal (under Werner Simpfendorfer, then Brigalia Bam since 1973). However, this refusal of neutrality, the abandonment of well-balanced generalities applicable to everyone and everywhere, for the sake of partiality, was strongly welcomed and supported by some churches and Christian movements, but opposed by others. The WCC as a whole was facing more and more the dilemma of possible lack of general approval, a process that unavoidably occurs when a world organization committed to such overall principles as "confessing Christ" and the "unity of churches" takes seriously the different contextual and historical conditions of witness, and, in doing so, fixes priorities in addition to it. High priority in education was given to:

1. EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION AND COMMUNITY

Within the mandate of the Division of Ecumenical Action, the educational working group in 1968 was instructed:

to stir up and equip all of God's people for ecumenical understanding, active engagement in renewing the life of the churches, and participation in God's work in a changing world.⁴

This dual focus on the "renewal of the churches" and the "transformation of society", as it was more definitely termed in 1973 in the modified aim for the Unit on Education and Renewal which emerged from DEA,⁵ demanded educational and theological analysis and action in the context of each particular historical, for example, regional and local reality. The determining context

³ Cf. *Work Book for the Assembly Committees: Prepared for the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, Sweden, 4-19 July 1968*, op. cit., p. 168.

⁴ NORMAN GOODALL (ed.): *The Uppsala Report 1968*, op. cit., p. 246.

⁵ DAVID E. JOHNSON (ed.): *Uppsala to Nairobi, 1968-1975: Report of the Central Committee to the Fifth Assembly of the WCC*. New York: Friendship Press; London: SPCK, 1975, p. 182.

of the WCC since 1968 has come to be the suffering of oppressed human beings, especially in the Third World. The WCC took sides in the name of the liberation and community promised in the perspective of eschatology opened up already in our history in Jesus Christ. The motto of the Fifth Assembly at Nairobi 1975: "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites" (and, correspondingly, the theme of Section IV: "Education for Liberation and Community") are already rooted in the Uppsala mandate.

We believe that each individual as a creature of God is entitled to fullness of life. We believe that this should be guaranteed through a social structure which liberates man to be God's responsible creature. Jesus Christ calls man together in love and community. But suffering, deprived or underprivileged people will not experience the love of God unless it is expressed in human relationship.

The Church's responsibility is therefore incarnate — to mediate the love of God in the world, so that all people may be able to experience it through a loving rather than a depriving community.⁶

2. THE BASIC ORIENTATION TOWARDS PEOPLE

The educational policy of the WCC between Uppsala and Nairobi was basically oriented towards people. It tried to reach the people at the "grass-roots" and to solve the problems *with* them, *not for* them; it did not trust any longer in a merely quantitative expansion of institutionalized schooling.

Words such as 'the dispossessed', 'the powerless', 'the silent', 'the unrepresented' were used to describe the particular constituency. Jargon, such as 'multipliers', 'conscientization', 'mini-consultation', 'cuadros', 'marginal church' became familiar in the Unit's work and documents. Programmes were designed which tried to build on the aspirations of people who were mostly cut off from the familiar patterns of ecumenical engagements. An important tool in this work was shared with the Unit by Paulo Freire as it became more and more involved in finding ways to awaken the consciousness of people to situations in which their own silence and submissiveness contributed to their continued bondage.⁷

3. AN OPEN AND EXPERIMENTAL STYLE

The emphasis on people demanded a style of work appropriate to it. The attempt was made to recognize people's problems not by getting others, superiors and officials, to speak, but the people themselves. A style of consultation was developed in which "unlearned but deeply educated people, sometimes illiterate but very articulate" could share their experiences without feeling repressed.⁸ Increasing preference was given to the small group. The encouraging results were utilized in Nairobi, where the work groups (8-15 people) "were for most participants probably the most satisfying item in their experience of the Assembly".⁹

Another characteristic element of style was the shift from sophisticated theoretical elaborations to the presentation of problems and proposals by

⁶ NORMAN GOODALL (ed.): *The Uppsala Report 1968*, op. cit., p. 246.

⁷ DAVID E. JOHNSON (ed.): *Uppsala to Nairobi, 1968-1975*, op. cit., p. 184.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁹ DAVID M. PATON (ed.): *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi, 23 November - 10 December 1975*. London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976, p. 26.

first telling stories and describing concrete situations in case studies, and by pictures, photos, and caricatures before drawing theoretical conclusions. (Cf. for example, the preparatory material for Section IV at Nairobi.) The basic assumption was that significant learning takes place in settings of visual and personal experience.

4. SEEING EDUCATION WHOLE

One of the visions of the Office of Education was to initiate a "holistic" approach. (Cf. *Seeing Education Whole*,¹⁰ the report of the first consultation of the Office held at Bergen, 1970.) In the foreword to the German edition of the report, *Bildung—Ganz*,¹¹ Ernst Lange explains the Bergen slogan.

First, it was to indicate the universal responsibility of the Church for the world in educational affairs, particularly for the public systems of general education. The churches should be urged to give up being busy only with their own narrow interests of self-preservation by specific religious education.

In many respects, the diastase (separation, K.E.N.)¹² between 'secular' and 'religious' education is broken down... Religious education — except for some special processes of instruction and training — is always taking place 'in, together with, and among' general education.¹³

Second, "seeing education whole" applies to the whole process of personal and collective development in its biographical and historical dimensions. Education as liberation is without content if it loses its roots in history and its sources in tradition. Tradition which preserves experiences of people in the past ought to be transformed into new experience for life today and tomorrow.

Third, the *agencies of education* comprise much more than schools. We are fascinated by the school as the most conspicuous institution. But we forget that the children and we all are also educated by the "street", the "mass media", "the structures of production", the "goods offered for consumption", and by the "world" as a whole.¹⁴ Reformed schools are, therefore, helpless and rather ineffective without a reform of society.

Finally, "seeing education whole" means "global" responsibility in our world as one world. In a way, education has become "a common problem of mankind as one". How can we relate "the local primary school to the growth of a world society"? Ernst Lange asks, "how the specific to the universal?"¹⁵ We should care for the education of the "international man" who feels responsible for much more than his local affairs only.

Jumping from the year 1970 to 1975, we have to ask which ideas, developed by staff persons in Geneva and by consultants all over the world, were fed into the preparatory process of the Fifth Assembly from 23 November to 10 December, 1975, in Nairobi. In an article published at the beginning of the year,

¹⁰ *Seeing Education Whole*. Geneva: WCC, 1971.

¹¹ ERNST LANGE: *Bildung—Ganz*. Geneva: WCC, 1971.

¹² Words or phrases in parentheses, followed by the initials K.E.N., represent author's notes.

¹³ ERNST LANGE: *Bildung—Ganz*, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

William B. Kennedy summarized two general guidelines which he believed ought to be given priority Christian attention in the future. The first related to:

5. THE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOLS AS SYSTEMS

In the years between Uppsala and Nairobi, Ivan Illich's deschooling analysis had been added to the Geneva pool of ideas.

His analysis, and the calm judgment of Huberman (Michael H., a Swiss expert in adult education, K.E.N.), help us understand how schools do, in fact, become cages for closing in the experience of persons and preventing their development toward liberation and humane community life.¹⁶

On the one hand, the Office of Education did not uncritically follow the programme of radical deschooling:

...one does not, therefore, have to conclude that educational effort is hopeless, nor undercut the committed activity of millions of teachers and others engaged in it.¹⁷

On the other hand, on the eve of Nairobi, the Office of Education had not yet found the keys to solve the problem. Everyone in Geneva and many people in the member churches realized that everywhere the decline of institutional church power was taking place with varying speeds.

That decline makes radical reappraisal necessary for church education efforts. ... But how do we discriminate? How do we choose the most promising possibilities? And even harder, how do we disengage ourselves from less productive educational efforts, often inherited from the past when they were more effective?¹⁸

6. THE REVOLUTION IN EPISTEMOLOGY — LEARNING BY REFLECTION AND ACTION

This last point, tentatively called by W. B. Kennedy "the revolution in epistemology", concerns the ways in which people learn and attain meaningful knowledge.

We learn more deeply where our feet take us than where our minds go. Committed action is the way of learning: when we do the truth it makes us free.¹⁹

This concept leans on Paulo Freire's idea of "conscientization" as a "reflection — action — process".²⁰ In the years before Nairobi, the separation of schooling from ongoing life became more and more suspect. The perspective of reform, suggested by the Office of Education, was not to bring into classrooms more expensive technology but to deal with the burning issues of life, such as social justice and peace. In the preparatory materials,

¹⁶ W. B. KENNEDY: "Education for Liberation and Community" in *Religious Education*, Vol. LXX, No. 1, 1975, pp. 5-44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁰ PAULO FREIRE: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paperback: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; hardback: London: Sheed and Ward, 1972.

the reflection-action concept was emphasized by proposing "critical consciousness" as top priority,²¹ accompanied by the perspective that one cannot learn to be Christian without risk and without commitment to justice and service "in the midst of a community thus committed".²²

7. CRITICAL AND OPEN QUESTIONS ON THE VERGE OF NAIROBI

If one wants to understand Nairobi and the direction of the educational policy of the WCC after Nairobi, it is necessary to remember the shortcomings in the years before.

Firstly, in the years after Uppsala, it was not possible to fully develop the educational policy of the WCC in all three directions as had originally been intended: a joint approach to general, Christian and theological education simultaneously. Theological education, except for scholarships, remained with other Units, and the issues of Christian education were being dealt with in the shadow of the questions of general education.

Secondly, although there were many contributions in the period before Nairobi to the Christian nurture of the child, the most important being the Glion Consultation on Sunday Schools (Learning Community 1973), the Church's advocacy for the *child* should have been stressed and elaborated more. The main attention was directed upon students and adults (Youth being a "desk" on its own).

Thirdly, a major criticism was expressed with reference to the theological foundation of the educational concepts. The work done in those years was not without theological guidelines. But these were never submitted to a broader elaboration. An analysis of the Annotated Agenda in the Nairobi *Work Book* shows that the theological patterns follow the overall WCC theology. (For the following remarks, see K. E. Nipkow: "Educational themes on the Agenda of the Ecumenical Movement"²³ and: "Zwischen Nairobi und Daressalam", 1977.²⁴)

The educational functions are seen as part of the purpose of the WCC to help churches, Christian movements, and individual Christians, so that the whole people of God may be equipped for mission to the world, to bear witness and serve as *co-worker* of God, who as *Creator* and *Lord of history* and as reconciler in *Jesus Christ* turns to the whole world and is ever at work liberating and uniting through the *Holy Spirit* even at the present time. This trinitarian approach includes a dynamic impact of revelation on our present-day history, a dynamic

²¹ Cf. The Cartigny Consultation, November 1974.

²² W. B. KENNEDY: "Education for Liberation and Community", *op. cit.*, p. 42. Cf. also the *Work Book for the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Annotated Agenda: Section IV. Geneva: WCC, 1975. For further study of the educational work of the WCC, see W. B. KENNEDY: "Education in the World Ecumenical Movement" in MARVIN J. TAYLOR (ed.): *Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976, pp. 208-218.

²³ KARL ERNST NIPKOW: "Educational Themes on the Agenda of the Ecumenical Movement", Document No. SH (A)-1, Hearing on Unit III, Sub-Hearing A, Nairobi, 1975. (German version: "Die pädagogische Thematik auf der Tagesordnung der Ökumene, in *Der Evangelische Erzieher*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1976, pp. 2-18.)

²⁴ KARL ERNST NIPKOW: "Zwischen Nairobi und Daressalam: Rückblick — Vorblick — Gemeinsamkeiten — Unterschiede" in *Ökumenische Rundschau*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1977, pp. 181-188.

conception of 'ongoing creation', as God is at work in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit as he was from the beginning. The ecumenical theology of the WCC confesses and emphasizes the present manifestation and the continuing revelation of Jesus Christ in the world.

The turning to present history on a christological and pneumatological basis by which the concept of creation becomes dynamic implies that the justification of the WCC's different actions, political, social, educational, is looked for by interpretation of the Scriptures *and* by interpretation of our reality, so that God's will may become plain for right *and* concrete confession of faith, including right unity, right liberating action, and right educational work. In a way, this "contextual theology" is necessary today; but inevitably it raises all the problems which are following a '*theology of discerning the signs of the times*'. At least some of the controversies today as to the WCC's engagements (mostly those objections made by evangelicals) can be traced back to this point; they refer to the unsolved relationship of historical analysis and action to the Scriptures and to the Holy Spirit.

As we see from this last section on critical objections and open questions, Nairobi had to be envisaged as a fundamental test of the WCC approach as a whole.

II. Implications of Nairobi for the churches' responsibility in education

Those who have participated in the Fifth Assembly are sometimes asked to sum up the total process in two or three sentences. I shall try to do so.

- i) The delegates and representatives of the churches in Nairobi maintained their view of responsibility for the world — and, in this respect, Nairobi continued Uppsala.
- ii) We all felt, however, that in order to go that hard and dark way we need spiritual strength, deep faith, and the experience of true Christian community; Nairobi revised the optimism of Uppsala and led into a more dedicated quest for the spiritual grounds.
- iii) I would sum up Nairobi thus: responsibility for the world and spirituality in Christ. By looking upon both of these, the overwhelming majority of delegates expressed their deep concern to avoid any false alternative; Nairobi was neither a "conflict assembly" (since the ecumenical movement did not suffer a breakdown) nor a "harmony-assembly" which concealed conflicts and nourished bad compromises. Nairobi turned out to be an unforgettable experience of Christian community in spite of all theological and political differences.

The educational outcomes reflect all these elements (i-iii) quite accurately. First we turn to the report of Section IV which was addressed to the churches.

1. LEARNING BETWEEN ALIENATION AND LIBERATION

Nairobi as a continuation of Uppsala — it is this element that has shaped the very opening of the report and its first major portion of analysis.²⁵

²⁵ DAVID M. PATON (ed.): *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975, op. cit.*, pp. 86-90.

We live in a world of great suffering and disunity; a world shackled to the domination and oppression of human beings by other human beings; a world which persons exploit for their own ends, disrupting the stability of nature; a world in which the major threats to survival now come from human beings themselves given through education the power to be more threatening.²⁶

There was certainly no reason at all to say that things had become better and that the necessity for the churches to be responsibly involved had decreased. What had happened in the years between Uppsala and Nairobi? The old problems had remained or had even grown worse and new issues had been added.

In these seven years, we have seen the growth of women's liberation movements, the increasing impatience and unrest of peoples seeking political and racial liberation, the spread of militaristic governments allied to a technocracy hell-bent on increasing the Gross National Product with little regard for the powerless majority; the violation of human rights and the abuse of power everywhere; the ruthless suppression of efforts at people's participation in changing social and economic structures for a more humane existence; the outbreak of war between nations and the confrontations within nations. There have also been signs of hope in the resolution of the civil war in Sudan, the end of direct super-power involvement in Indochina, the changed situation in Portugal, and so on. During this period, too, the whole economic system which has dominated the world for the past two hundred years began breaking down. The growing pollution of the environment, the population explosion, the world monetary crisis, the world crisis in food and other commodities, the widening gap between rich and poor within and between nations have converged to create a situation which threatens the very future of international society.²⁷

The delegates reacted to this situation, not by refusing to be involved, or by seeing education as independent of all these developments. They identified "the educational system and institutions" as being "all too often mirror images of society, reinforcing by their practices the values which society holds".²⁸

There was much discussion between the delegates from the countries of the Third World and those from other parts of the world on how to judge the process by which people are being shaped, conditioned by education, and assimilated into one's own culture and history.²⁹ The danger of "alienation" and the search for "liberation" were differently interpreted.

The Africans and many others who had been taught along the western patterns of their former colonial rulers now stressed "indigenous values" and the "local" context of life: "We cannot be liberated if we are divorced from the culture which bred us and which continues to shape and condition us."³⁰

Europeans and North Americans, however, identified "alienation" the other way round. Many people in affluent countries suffer from being helplessly subject to "consumer-orientation" that "all too often breeds a competitiveness and selfishness which is anti-Christian"; or they feel "lost", "lonely"

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁷ DAVID E. JOHNSON (ed.): *Uppsala to Nairobi, 1968-1975*, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁸ DAVID M. PATON (ed.): *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975*, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

and "frightened" in their culture by many other reasons. To them, liberation means to protest against "educational conditioning", that is, going along the narrow and questionable lines of their own civilization. It was from these groups, too, that in the African setting of the Assembly, a setting of nation building and new nationalism, the "universality in Christianity" and the "growing awareness of the global nature of problems" was remembered "which calls for an education which both informs and transcends the local".³¹

In my opinion, the discussion on education between alienation and liberation was a very impressive example of how Christians who come from very different historical and geographical backgrounds can *learn from each other*, guided by the same spirit. The outcomes of the discussion showed, secondly, that each country and church has to go its own way according to its local or regional needs. There was a clear agreement, however, in educational principles. Thirdly, we all felt also that the situation of the Third World was worst as pupils, people, and teachers "face a double alienation", from their own culture in so far as persisting western patterns push away their indigenous values, and they are then further alienated by forces inherent in the westernized model itself with its "values" of competitiveness, increase of income, social prestige, consumption, and so on.

2. THE INHERENT EDUCATIVE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN WORSHIP AND LIFE-STYLE

Nairobi was a revision of Uppsala: to prove this statement we have to look at the second half of the report. The heading of the following paragraph reads: "The Christian Community as a Sign of Liberation".³² How is this to be implemented? Why turn now to the Christian community when the preceding analysis was completely devoted to secular culture and society? Why have at all now a chapter on community? What has community to do with liberation?

At this point we come across one of the theological turning points of Nairobi. While the introduction of Section IV report, "in obedience to the commandment of Jesus Christ to love our neighbour", calls us "to work for the creation of a society in which humanity, justice, openness, and freedom reflect the will of God for his creation",³³ now we read that: "At the centre of the learning experience in the Church stands worship and the liturgy. This is the joyous expression of the Christian's dependence on God and Christ's presence in the life of his community."³⁴ Society and Christian community are bound together. Christian activity in God's creation is linked with worship as an expression of the Christian's dependence on God and "active passivity" in prayer, in praising, thanking, and waiting. This is what I wanted to say by pointing at the grounds of belief and sources of spirituality as prerequisites for all our secular engagement.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

By "seeing education whole" in this new way, not excluding what it had meant in the years before (see above I, 4), but transforming it by and into this new spiritual background, the importance of "the interpretation of the essential message of the Bible and tradition" as "one of the central educative tasks of the Church" was given a new and strong emphasis.^{34bis}

Secondly, "the entire life of the Christian community" was seen as "educative": "the quality of its worship and work as a whole determines the quality of the nurture of its members".³⁵ The final paragraph of the report throws a special light upon this "inherent educative nature of the total Christian experience and the whole Christian community"³⁶ by asking each local congregation "to take seriously its life-style and to ask what witness this is giving to the world and what nurture it is giving to its members".³⁷

Thus, the report ends where it started — with the responsibility for a convincing way of confessing Christ in the "world":

In each situation, the Church must examine its style of life to find what life-style is saying to the world: to learn whether what it portrays in its life is contradicting the gospel message, which brings judgment to the rich and hope to the poor.³⁸

3. BEYOND FALSE ALTERNATIVES

The movement of argumentation in the Nairobi report on education has the form of an ellipse, comprising two poles, world and worship, liberation and community, action-reflection processes (including "doing theology"³⁹) and prayer, finally coming back to the beginning, holding together both fundamental aspects as one joint perspective.

I am very grateful that these were the outcomes of Nairobi. In my country, they are extraordinarily helpful to bridge the deep gap between "political theology" and conservative "evangelicals" and to lead both to a true understanding of Christian commitment. The outcomes of Nairobi as to the understanding of mission and evangelism were quite similar. The report of Section I on "Confessing Christ Today" refuted all false alternatives:

We regret all divisions in thinking and practice between the personal and the corporate dimensions. 'The whole Gospel for the whole person and the whole world' means that we cannot leave any area of human life and suffering without the witness of hope.

We regret that some reduce liberation from sin and evil to social and political dimensions, just as we regret that others limit liberation to the private and eternal dimensions.⁴⁰

The same "holistic" approach was proposed by Mortimer Arias in his paper on "That the World may Believe", "rejecting equally a reduction of evangelism to 'saving souls' and of the Gospel to a programme of service and social action. Social justice, personal salvation, cultural affirmation,

^{34bis} *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

and church growth are all integral parts of God's saving acts." ⁴¹ It depends on times and places, what to do and how to set priorities; evangelism as education must be "contextual".

III. The mandate of Nairobi for future policy of the WCC

1. THE GUIDELINES OF THE HEARING REPORT

The report of Section IV is addressed to the member churches. The *Report of the Hearing on Unit III, Education and Renewal*, as it has been approved by the Assembly, is addressed to the WCC. The educational policy of the Office of Education in Geneva after Nairobi had to start from this document, not from the Section report.

There are no differences between the two reports as far as the general lines are concerned. But in the hearing report we find more specific conclusions drawn with respect to the obligations and possibilities of the WCC Sub-unit on Education itself.

Unfortunately, the complete hearing reports have not been published in *Breaking Barriers* except for arbitrarily shortened "Summary Reports". ⁴²

If we remember the merits and the shortcomings of the work of the Office of Education before Nairobi (see above I, 1-7), we understand why many things were approved in Nairobi; and why, in other points, critical and quite new impulses were given. To begin with, the hearing report urges the Sub-unit on Education to:

keep to its commitment to the powerless and voiceless, the dispossessed, disadvantaged and handicapped persons. In this sense, the Church has to be the children's advocate and prevent their becoming objects of indoctrination and injustices in either general or church education. ⁴³

So far, the paper follows and corroborates the old line. (See above I, 1, 2, 6.) But as critical questions had been posed before and at Nairobi as to the significance of Paulo Freire's concept, not only for adult education but also for traditional Christian education, the hearing report continues:

It is further necessary to show more concretely how the new concept of a dialogue-oriented learning and 'conscientization' is actually to be put into practice in Sunday schools, religious instruction in schools, confirmation classes and adult education. ⁴⁴

Correspondingly, the Sub-unit on Education was called upon to emphasize more strongly Christian education beside general education:

On the one hand, it was recommended, 'in the field of general education, to continue to help the churches fulfil their indispensable responsibility in reshaping

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴² For the report on the Sub-unit on Education, see *ibid.*, pp. 308-311. The complete reports, however, can be read in a compendium of documents, edited by the WCC: *Assembly Reports and Proposals Concerning WCC Programmes*, 9 January, 1976.

⁴³ *Assembly Reports and Proposals Concerning WCC Programmes*, *op. cit.*, Unit III, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and humanizing the educational, political, economic, and social systems of their societies, and the mass media, in accordance with the Christian commitment to social justice'.⁴⁵ (Cf. above I, 5.)

On the other hand, the Sub-unit was prompted to 'help to develop programmes and curricula for Christian education within and through congregational life with a balanced recognition of both a theologically responsible and understandable interpretation of Scripture and living tradition and a realistic and critical analysis of what people experience in life and for which they have to be responsible'.⁴⁶

This last guideline refers to the outcomes of the Section discussions (see above II, 2) with their reference to congregation, life-style, Scriptures, and tradition and tries to link to them those impulses in the discussions on religious education which stressed critical analysis and daily life experience.

Some other guidelines proposed:

- to help churches to promote "*education for ecumenism*";
- to "reappraise the role of church-sponsored schools in order to liberate them from elitism and from the heritage which hinders their real participation in human development and nation building";
- to "develop new styles of leadership and participation patterns which will undergird self-awareness and support of positive images for women and minority groups";
- "in response to the increasingly dramatic challenge of the growing ecological crisis in the world, including hunger and population, to initiate a task force or a major consultation on the educational consequences...";
- and to "reinforce and expand the WCC Leadership Development and Scholarship Programme".⁴⁷

I have listed all proposals that have been approved by the Assembly in order to show how the two overall issues of "liberation" and "community" as the motto of Nairobi ("Jesus Christ Frees and Unites") and of Section IV, in particular, are being reflected. To sum up so far, we can say the following.

The guidelines for the future demand an *open approach*, they do not allow the Office of Education to support a retreat of Christian education into a closed world of self-indulgence and self-edification. One cannot go behind Uppsala and behind what has been done in the seven years between Uppsala and Nairobi. This is one more reason why we had to look at this part of the history of the WCC very carefully (above, part I). The old challenges had not disappeared and new ones had come up as well, such as, the "dramatic challenge of the growing ecological crisis". (See the excellent paper read by Charles Birch at Nairobi.)

It is also evident, however, that the educational policy of the WCC has to be deepened by a *theological clarification of the criteria of educational activities*. In this sense, the hearing report recommended:

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

to seek closer cooperation with other WCC Units in order to bring in the theological reflection especially displayed in Unit I . . . and . . . to deepen the reflection on the biblical foundation of education and renewal by linking with the portfolio of Biblical Studies (Hans-Ruedi Weber).⁴⁸

In the meantime, the linkage of the portfolio of Hans-Ruedi Weber has taken place and the cooperation with other Units is making progress.

Last, but not least, the hearing report recommends the promotion of what has been called "decentralization" and "regionalization". The historical, political, and social situations of the member churches differ widely. Would ideas which had been developed in Geneva and successfully applied in a western country be equally applicable in the German Democratic Republic? Evidently not, if one knows the situation. Therefore the hearing report says:

Unit III will work along the following lines:

It will be a forum for the exchange of experiences in education from the different regions and churches so that the churches can learn from one another — (by this) a central ecumenical agency in Geneva meets regional and local needs better than by trying to offer one overall concept or programme.⁴⁹

Since Nairobi, more than two years have passed. What has been implemented in these years? What is going to be accomplished in the future? William B. Kennedy, the former director of the Office, left Geneva at the end of 1975. Ulrich Becker, the new director, could not begin before March 1977. Despite many good and helpful services rendered by the Office in 1976, it was apparently not able to do what it wanted.

In the present situation (January 1978), the budget of the Office is heavily shattered by the devaluation of the dollar and by the fact that, up to now, the complement of staff is not complete. It has still not been possible to employ people to be responsible for some very important programmes.

Furthermore, it stands to reason that even with a better financial and staff situation, we must not expect that the Office of Education will ever be able to tackle all the issues which were listed in the catalogue of the hearing report. Soon after Nairobi, a necessary process of selecting and establishing priorities took place. Which were the selected projects?

2. CHURCH-SPONSORED SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

In the report of Section IV, we read the sentence: "When we speak to the world, we speak also, and first, to ourselves."⁵⁰ It is not very persuasive if churches criticize the secular school system and leave their own schools unreformed. As a clear consequence of the pre-Nairobi development (see above I, 5), and of Nairobi itself (see above II, 1), the WCC has now approved a programme by which "church-sponsored schools" and other "church-related educational institutions" shall profoundly be assessed.

As to schools, the churches are in a period of transition. The separation between Church and state in many countries has led to basic changes which

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1. The words, "by this", have been added from the original draft.

⁵⁰ DAVID M. PATON (ed.): *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975, op. cit.*, p. 87.

are most visible in the growing number of countries where nationalization of schools has taken place. In regions where church-sponsored schools are still maintained, the churches are often faced with a dilemma: to keep their schools running, or give them up because of the innumerable questions raised with regard to the content of education dispensed or imposed, the degree of freedom left for fulfilling their own educational objectives, or financial support which represents, in many cases, a burden for the churches.

In my country, this issue is a burning question, too; it will be dealt with at the next synod of the Evangelical Church of Germany, November 1978, in Bethel. One aspect is whether and how far church-sponsored schools have to and are allowed to follow objectives that are different from other state or private schools. Many parents look for schools where their children feel comfortable and enjoy learning. They have great expectancies as to alternative patterns of teaching and learning. Some of our church schools have succeeded in transforming the traditional school organization into a school community with attractive community building activities which reflect a new spirit. The possibilities, however, are limited, as these schools are to obey the same centralized standards as other state schools; for example, as far as the final examinations are concerned.

In the Third World, other questions are raised. Is it true that Christian schools "are just serving an elite of those who can afford to pay? Is it true that many schools are diploma-oriented and consequently not providing the communities with the kind of persons needed for full human development? Is it true that in some particular cases they are aiming at graduating students for whom jobs are not available?"⁵¹ As far as I know by personal observations, it is true in many cases. But it is also true that churches (for example, the National Council of Churches in Kenya) have found alternative ways which really serve the people.

In my opinion, the programme must carefully consider regional differences. The guideline, however, should be to encourage churches to maintain schools only if these can grow to become places of non-alienating learning and a true spirit of humanity.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF THE WCC IN THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD (IYC)

Everybody loves children. So one generally assumes that everything is done in the best interests of the child. There is a lot of truth in it, but it is also a dangerous assumption; for it blurs our mind to face the real situation of the child today. And this situation is alarming.⁵²

With these words, deliberations are opened by which the Office of Education justifies the involvement of the WCC in the IYC 1979 and beyond it. In August 1977, the Central Committee considered the preparations envisaged

⁵¹ From the description of the WCC Church-Sponsored School Programme.

⁵² Working paper on WCC involvement in the International Year of the Child, December 1977.

and put forward the recommendation "to regard the concern of the child as a continuing WCC priority".

The decision taken by the General Assembly of the United Nations, to declare 1979 the IYC, is in line with the growing attention paid to the churches' advocacy for the child in the years before Nairobi and after. The hearing report on Unit III had already tried to interpret the Uppsala "commitment to the powerless and voiceless" by relating it to the children. "In this sense, the Church has to be the children's advocate and prevent their becoming objects of indoctrination and injustices in either general or church education." This was a new and necessary perspective.

In the history of the churches, we perceive a denial of the child by Christian theology. When theologians thought about sin and redemption, they were envisaging and addressing grown-ups. Some great theologians, such as Soeren Kierkegaard, expressly declared that Christian belief is not for children. The message of Mark 10: 13-16 has been misinterpreted for centuries by regarding this story as a theological lesson for adults only (which it certainly is to *some* extent), an *exemplum* of the justifying belief, instead of taking its content as a real fact. These very children in that very situation were blessed and accepted by Jesus. They cannot be seen as "instrumental" only for the belief of adult Christians.

The most remarkable decision of the Central Committee of the WCC as "to regard the concern of the child as a continuing WCC priority" and the attempts of Ulrich Becker to link the involvement of the Sub-unit on Education with other Units promise a joint approach that might have far-reaching influence if we all help. This programme can show, firstly, that within the WCC (and, similarly, in the churches) not only the educators in the Office of Education have "to learn theology" by close cooperation with other Units, but also all the others have "to learn from the child" and from their proponents in the Sub-unit on Education. This is, by the way, exactly another important guideline of the Nairobi hearing: "to help the other Units to see the educational implications of their own main issues, e.g. unity, dialogue, mission".⁵³

The advocacy for the child is, secondly, a topic which truly integrates WCC's commitment to general *and* Christian education as recommended in the Nairobi hearing report.

The WCC and its member churches are faced with two simple but decisive questions:

- Will our children have life? And what sort of life is that to be?
- Will our children have faith? And what kind of faith will that be?⁵⁴

I shall not enter into a presentation and discussion of some other important issues which try to implement the Nairobi mandate. They are, among others, "education for ecumenism" — an issue being tackled by the joint efforts of the Sub-units on Education and Renewal —, and the continuing contributions

⁵³ *Assembly Reports and Proposals Concerning WCC Programmes, op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Working Paper on WCC involvement in the International Year of the Child, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

to curriculum development in religious education. Here, an interesting survey on so-called "Common Catechetical Programmes" has been presented by Yushi Nomura who worked with the Office after Nairobi. This survey covers curricula such as: "Christian Living Today" (the East African Certificate of Education "Syllabus 223", 1975 — a creation of a committee of Catholics and Protestants from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), and "Living Together" (the City of Birmingham Education Committee "Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction", 1975), to mention only two out of many more.

Nor am I able to anticipate the nature of the contributions of the Sub-unit on Education to that overall WCC programme which bears the clumsy but, nevertheless, meaningful title: "Search for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society". The preparations are still in the early stages.

To conclude, I am encouraged to say that the challenges of Nairobi have been answered by the educational policy of the WCC in a creative way and by a deep sense of both educational and theological responsibility. But the resources given to the Geneva office are small compared with its mandate. It is up to us to help and to contribute in the spirit that unites us all.