

---

# Ecumenical Literature

---

*Eryl Davies*

---

There is such a wide range of literature available now from the World Council of Churches that some guidance is necessary in pinpointing the more useful books/magazines either for introductory or specialist reading. I estimate there are currently 70 books/booklets dealing with the history and present activities of the WCC, these publications being mostly published, or distributed, by the WCC. In addition, they have published 25 books on Inter-Faith dialogue, 24 books and 18 research booklets on Mission and Evangelism as well as 8 books in the WCC Mission Series. Furthermore, there are now about 50 books on the related subjects of Sharing, Service (especially to the poor) and Development, 20 books on Church and Society, 15 books on Churches in International Affairs then 16 books dealing with Racism. While this is not an exhaustive list of the number of their publications nor of subjects covered yet it indicates the priority which the WCC has given to publishing in recent years and also the abundance of material which is now available. By contrast, the amount of evangelical literature in these areas is small and the quality variable. Before mentioning specific books for further reading, I want to refer to some WCC journals/magazines.

## Magazines

High on my list of priorities for subscriptions is the WCC monthly magazine *ONE WORLD* which is attractively produced and comprehensive in its coverage of ecumenical developments and theology. Here is a really newsy magazine with details and ideas we can constantly refer to and consider in our churches. No 132 (Jan-Feb 1988) was invaluable in surveying the first 40 years of the WCC, that is, 1948—1988. For more detailed study, *THE ECUMENICAL REVIEW*, published quarterly, is stimulating. Again, Vol 40, No 3-4 (July-October 1988) is a commemorative issue and is worth obtaining.

To monitor inter-religious dialogue, the quarterly journal *DISCERNMENT* is available but I prefer the monthly *CURRENT DIALOGUE* for its in-depth coverage of major issues and consultations. For missiology, the *INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSION* is indispensable. This is a 168-page quarterly, previously published by the International Missionary Council, but now published by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the WCC.

## Historical Books

I am delighted that the WCC has republished the standard *HISTORY OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT* in two volumes; vol 1, 1517—1948, pb, p 838, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill; vol 2, 1948—1968, pb, pp 571, edited by Harold E Fay. These two books have been out of print for many years and only

available through libraries. Here is an authoritative and 'official' history of the Ecumenical Movement.

A more popular history of the WCC is authored by W A Visser't Hooft and entitled, *THE GENESIS AND FORMATION OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES* (pb, pp 146, 1982). The book is especially significant because the author was personally involved in the formation and development of the WCC from as early as 1933; he was appointed as the first General Secretary of the WCC and served in this capacity until 1966. This book fills a major gap and contributes new, important information which was not included in an essay he earlier wrote for the official historical account of the WCC. (*The Genesis of the WCC, A HISTORY OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT* Vol 1, cp Memoirs, ch 12, 1973, SCM.) In the Preface, the author writes:

This book seeks to describe the process which led to the formation of the WCC in 1948. That process began with proposals made in Constantinople in 1919, and in Uppsala in the same year; it was completed with the attempt to define the nature of the World Council in 1950 (p vii).

Other useful books in the historical section include official reports, for example, of WCC Assemblies such as *GATHERED FOR LIFE: 1975—1983*, Report of the Central Committee to the Sixth Assembly. Another source book, *SIX HUNDRED CONSULTATIONS (1948—1982)* is a mine of information, providing details of the dates and venues of consultations/conferences together with themes and division of subjects as well as details of publication of the material in either books or journals, etc. This is further supplemented by *MAJOR STUDIES AND THEMES IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT SINCE 1948*. This latter work is divided into two parts; major studies undertaken by various World Council units and sub-units, then themes of numerous ecumenical assemblies, conferences and consultations. The book is not exhaustive in its coverage as it deliberately excludes WCC single consultations held since 1948 and the whole programmes of WCC sub-units dealing with specific subjects or concerns over a prolonged period of time. Nevertheless, this is an abbreviated guide and useful reference service which will facilitate further studies.

I cannot leave the historical section without referring to *HOPE IN THE DESERT: THE CHURCHES' UNITED-RESPONSE TO HUMAN NEED, 1944—1988*, edited by Kenneth Slack (1986, pb, pp 143). This interesting story belongs to the Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refuge and World Service (CICARWS) and which expresses the practical concern of WCC members for a needy world. 'CICARWS', writes Emilio Castro in the Foreword, 'needs to be a forum for theological debates which will examine ways of expressing our belonging to Jesus Christ and our fellowship with mankind...its role cannot be reduced to that of being a mere instrument for effective action. It must generate ideas, and provide for reciprocal inspiration and mutual correction' (pp ix-x). Not only is this book a challenge to us to care practically for the needy peoples of the world; it is a serious challenge to evangelicals to think theologically and biblically on the crucial relationship between the gospel and social concern.

## Theology Books

In this section, three books can be singled out for their usefulness in introducing readers to the central theological issues on the contemporary ecumenical agenda. One such book is Philip Potter's *LIFE IN ALL ITS FULNESS*, while Visser't Hooft writes in depth on the vexed question of *THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN AN AGE OF EMANCIPATION*. A more popular book is *CALLED TO BE ONE IN CHRIST* (ed M Kinnama & T F Best) which was Faith and Order Paper 127. This book deals with the challenge of united/uniting Churches today and case studies from around the world.

## Projects

Another interesting area of study and information is that relating to local ecumenical projects. *LOCAL CHURCH UNITY*, for example, provides guidelines for local ecumenical projects and sponsoring bodies and *LOCAL ECUMENISM* illustrates how Church unity is seen and practised by congregations. *LOCAL ECUMENICAL PROJECTS* is more basic and represents the sixth report to the Churches by the Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England. The same committee has published an extensive *REGISTER OF LOCAL ECUMENICAL PROJECTS, ECUMENICAL OFFICERS and SPONSORING BODIES* which is a handy reference tool.

## Evangelical Books

The WCC has provided us with an abundance of books on ecumenism; in comparison, evangelical books on the subject are at a premium. Perhaps here I can welcome the publication of Hywel Jones' detailed evaluation of ecumenical documents on Church unity under the title, *GOSPEL AND CHURCH*. The book is published by the Evangelical Press of Wales and costs £8.95 (pb, pp 176). In his Introduction, Professor Douglas MacMillan observes that 'no other book of this type has been produced by the evangelical world. This is the only serious, scholarly...work which we have to help us evaluate the issues it confronts... It breaks new ground...' (p 9). Buy a copy and study it carefully!

---

*We have tried to show the ecumenism of the WCC is not in keeping with the gospel. It is not based on an infallible Scripture, but allows for an open canon and for the development of tradition in and by the church. This undermines authority. In addition, it does not confess that Christ's work on the cross is so acceptable to the Father that any notion of its being repeated or re-presented denies the atonement. It refuses to say that faith without works is the **only** way by which Christ and His salvation may be received by the ungodly, but asserts instead that it **may** be so received. To do that is to deny the heart of the good news and to deprive the sinner of any assurance of eternal life.*

H R Jones, *GOSPEL AND CHURCH*, p 155

---