Book Reviews

„*Encountering the God of Life*” – Report of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Edited by Erlinda N. Senturias and Theodore A. Gill, Jr., 468 pages, ISBN: 978-2-8254-1648-8

Dan Streza*

“God of life, lead us to justice and peace” was the theme of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which brought together more than 3,500 paying participants and thousands of other visitors from 100 countries. The Assembly was held from 30th October to 8th November 2013 in Busan, South Korea.

The essential documents of the Assembly as well as its main actions are captured in the volume *„Encountering the God of Life” - Report of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, which also reflects the intellectual and spiritual stature of the event. It includes presentations and contributions by committees, conversation groups, church leaders, featured speakers, and other participants, as well as the pre-Assembly convocations. In addition, the report offers a sampling of formal greetings and messages from individuals and organizations throughout the Christian world. The report is the tenth in a series of “official reports” from WCC Assemblies; previous reports are for Assemblies held in Amsterdam (1948), Evanston (1954), New Delhi (1961), Uppsala (1968), Nairobi (1975), Vancouver (1983), Canberra (1991), Harare (1998), and Porto Alegre (2006).

Six plenary sessions offered a wide range of reflections and discussions on the Assembly theme outlined above, on Christianity in Asia, and on specific issues of unity and witness, peace and justice around the globe. The 21 “ecumenical conversations” covered the most pressing questions facing Christianity today, such as the radically altered religious landscape, economic globalization, climate change, gender violence, as well as important new ecumenical insights concerning mission, spirituality, and Christian service.

The many voices reflected in the report are remarkably diverse, displaying multiple aspects of the ecumenical reality; from the opening sermon of

* Dan Streza, Deac. PhD, Teaching Assistant at the “Andrei Țaguna” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Romania. Address: Mitropoliei 20, 550179 Sibiu, Romania; e-mail: dan_steza@yahoo.com.

Patriarch Karekin II to the closing homily of Father Michael Lapsley, one can find various interpretations of the Assembly theme.

The greetings and messages addressed to the 10th Assembly contain a more inclusive and promising representation of traditions than at any previous such meeting. The concept of consensus-building and spiritual discernment among Churches already in membership may provide the opportunity to find new ways to move toward unity on a number of fronts.

People and institutions whose efforts in God's service helped maintain the work and witness of the 10th Assembly in Busan are listed in the report appendices.

The report and other relevant publications are available on the Internet and through social media, thus providing improved access to daily developments within the ecumenical movement.

Personal/ Participant Report¹

I would like to round off this review with a brief presentation of my experience as a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the Busan Assembly.

The Assembly opened with a great liturgical and artistic event, as a welcome to all members; the Prime Minister of Korea, amongst others, brought his greetings. Events over the next few days centered on the Assembly theme, and were designed to include all participants. Each day began and closed with prayer that was full of meaning and color. The liturgical gifts of diverse denominations included also a variety of prayer methods. The morning devotions were followed by Bible Study, which was offered in 5 small groups in 5 languages, as well as in larger groups in 2 languages, English and Korean. Bible Study proposed a reflection on moments in history in which life was threatened, yet justice prevailed through God's grace.

Each day, Bible Study was followed by committee meetings and plenary sessions, which were large-scale events providing space for celebration and inspiration. The Asia plenary was very special, presenting Asian diversity and culture, as well as the ecumenical movement. The other four plenary sessions on Unity, Mission, Justice, and Peace also highlighted the global challenges the Churches must face together and described how Ecumenical Partners work together. The Peace plenary had Ms. Leymah Gbowee, Noble Peace Laureate, sharing her experience of leading the non-violent movement of Christian and Muslim women that played an important role in ending the Liberian civil war in 2003.

¹ For a complete orthodox perspective, see: Daniel Buda, "The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches: an Orthodox evaluation", *Revista Teologica*, nr.4/2013, p.178-190.

After the thematic plenary, there were in-depth ecumenical conversations on 21 different topics of common concern. Each conversation focused on a 90-minutes dialogue. The conversations were the joint effort of Churches and Partners to profile existing cooperation.

The Madang (“market place” in Korean) allowed for the wider participation of all those attending the Assembly through workshops, exhibitions, theatre, visual arts, and discussions.

Management and administrative issues were discussed during dedicated sessions with the participation of member Church delegates and official Ecumenical Partner representatives. During these sessions, the focus was on changes in governance, elections, and reports from Assembly Committees on program guidelines, policy, public issues, finance, and Assembly messages.

The younger generations were also represented in Busan, both among delegates and in clusters of volunteers, co-opted staff, visitors, and students engaged in coursework for the academic programs of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) and the Korean Ecumenical Theological Institute (KETI).