

27 October 1983

To: WTS Executive Committee

From: Don Dayton, Promotional Secretary

Re: Upcoming Executive Committee Meeting in Anderson

David Thompson's recent letter and agenda reminded me that I had planned a memo before our meeting. I hope this reaches you all before you leave for Anderson. To save some time there I wanted to put a few things in writing and send you a couple of items in advance.

I expect that one of the most complex items on our agenda will be the invitation from Jeff Gros to establish a "liaison" with the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches of Christ. I have wondered if we ought not to invite Jeff to meet with us some that night. I have heard him talk some about his agenda for the Faith and Order and the role that we and others might have in it. I think that if possible he should express some of this personally to us and also be available to respond to some of our questions and discussion. I understand that he will be riding from Columbus with David Cubie, but that he has plans to spend the evening with John Smith (retired Anderson faculty member who has served on the Commission for a decade or two). We might invite him to dinner for some open discussion of this with us before he goes to the Smiths. If he can't, or if this should seem inappropriate, David Cubie should have a long talk in the car so that at least the two of us will have some of the perspective of Jeff on things that he probably ought not to put in writing.

Meanwhile I wanted to put in writing some facts relevant to our discussions. I have tried to investigate what is happening to the other invitations that went out concurrently with ours. There may have been others with different results, but I have known of three which I have tried to follow:

(1) Mark Branson, head of the Theological Students Fellowship (and editor of its Bulletin), the graduate and seminary arm of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, will be joining the Commission at the Spring Meeting. He reports that the President of IVCF gave his official approval a couple of weeks ago.

(2) The Society for Pentecostal Studies will be meeting the same weekend as the WTS in Cleveland, Tennessee, at Lee College. They will be considering a similar invitation from Jeff (and incidentally are quite annoyed that he will be with us!). I

called the current president, Mel Robeck of Fuller Theological Seminary. He had already announced last year his intention to center his presidential address on the theme of the "unity of the Church" in the Pentecostal tradition. He has incorporated into his address (I've enclosed an advance copy of the more extended MS from which his address will be extracted) a recommendation to accept Jeff's invitation. He is certain that the SPS will act favorably on the invitation; they had already been strategizing about how to impact the ecumenical circles and related issues. They may well be more ready to consider these questions because of the channels created by the charismatic or "neo-Pentecostal" movement in the mainline denominations. Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, etc. (usually charismatic) have been regular participants for some time now in the SPS. At any rate, the issue in the SPS seems not to be whether to send a representative but who that representative should be. They seem to be having internal squabbles about such issues as what discipline should be represented and whether that person should be on their executive committee.

(3) Very recently has been formed a new denomination, the International Evangelical (actually Pentecostal) Church, a loose international network of churches. This new body immediately joined the WCC and sent delegates to the Vancouver Assembly. One of the delegates, Kim Crutchfield, a young pastor in Atlanta who graduated from one of the most extreme Bible Colleges in the Pentecostal Movement, attended the Commission meetings in October here in Chicago and tells me that his church will surely appoint him to the Commission as he goes off to Princeton to complete his M.Div.

I have personally been very surprised at the ease with which these decisions have been made (or are predicted to be made), and have begun to conclude that we may well be entered a new era of relationships between the ecumenical "mainstream" and some of those bodies that lie outside it for various reasons. This was certainly my impression in Vancouver where I learned not to trust much of the negative media coverage of such events and participated in the resulting "open letter" (reprinted in the enclosed TSF Bulletin). I have not yet seen Tim Smith's recent essay in Mid-Stream on evangelicalism and the ecumenical movement, but I heard a version of it at Wheaton, where Tim told me that his research in Geneva a decade or so ago resulting in an unfinished MS calling for more evangelical participation in the WCC. The enclosed report on Vancouver from Richard Lovelace of Gordon-Conwell certainly suggests a new attitude. Just how far this new attitude extends I am not sure, but it does seem to indicate that we may be entering a new era on these questions. If so, we certainly ought to consider this background to the question.

I should make a few comments about my visit to the NCCC Faith and Order meetings that were held here in Chicago a couple of weeks ago in conjunction with a conference on the churches' response to the recently drafted WCC Faith and Order document on "Baptism,

Eucharist and Ministry." The enclosed brochure on the Faith and Order Commission lays out the future plans. I sat in on the discussions of the study on the "Apostolic Faith" which is basically a study of whether the Nicene Creed can stand as a common affirmation of all the Christian Churches. I was a little stunned to discover that this section is chaired by Glenn Hinson, a Southern Baptist. (The Southern Baptists are not members of the NCCC, but have two representatives on the Commission.) I sat in on basically two sessions, one devoted to the Jewish response to some of these questions (Michael Wyschograd represents the American Jewish Committee, I believe, on the Commission) and another to planning the future discussions. I was impressed in the latter to discover a great deal of openness to, and even interest in, expanding the base of the dialogue. The Lutheran who chairs the Commission commented that even though he would personally dislike the result he thought that the peculiar contribution of the American discussions of the questions would be to insert into the WCC discussions a perspective that would be representative of the more non-creedal and even "spirit-oriented" character of much of the American Church. There was certainly a much greater representation in the discussions than I expected of the more "free church" wing of the church.

I can respond to your questions at more length in Anderson. But as a result of the meeting I am now prepared, I think, to advocate the acceptance of Jeff's invitation. I do this on three grounds primarily:

(1) I think that such a move would be of inestimable value to the holiness tradition in general. I have been shocked to discover recently the extent to which we are not even on the intellectual map of the ecumenical movement. We are either lumped with Pentecostals or otherwise caricatured if we are on the horizon at all. Only recently have we been considered an option for meetings of the World Confessional Bodies. I've been thinking the last couple of years about an essay on "Lost: One Whole Theological Tradition" to help restore us to standard reference books, etc. It seems that the Faith and Order Commission would be a place that we could work to correct this problem without immediately committing our churches to any form of conciliar membership.

(2) I think we also have a contribution to make to the discussions as such. We represent a vision of the gospel and its morally transforming power that is not well represented in the NCCC. It seemed to me that the Commission would genuinely welcome our participation and contribution--and that we ought to be willing to articulate our understanding of the gospel in any context. Frankly, I found the "Apostolic Faith" group small enough (and perhaps even vulnerable enough) that there would be space to play a major role in emerging discussions. I think that it ought to be a part of the "missional" strategy of the WTS to attempt to impact such discussions.

(3) For some time now I have thought that the holiness

churches could play a strategic and significant role by standing in the gap between the "evangelical" world of the NAE, etc. and the broader conciliar movements. Our largest churches (Nazarenes, Church of God, Salvation Army) have not been members of the NAE. The Salvation Army has been a member of the WCC and The Church of God has been active in several aspects of the NCC over the years. The Wesleyans, the Nazarenes, and the Church of God have all been written up in the "ecumenical exercise" of the WCC by which a profile of the church is published in the Ecumenical Review as a means of introducing the church in question to the broader ecumenical movement. It has seemed to me that our non-fundamentalist style of theology and biblical studies is a natural bridge--in addition to the fact that our history (from Wesleyan abolitionism to the Salvation Army) provides some of the most important models of the conjunction of piety, evangelism and social involvement that are to be found in the whole church. It seems to me that if we have these gifts we ought to be sharing them for the edification of the whole church--especially in this time when we are desperately in need of bridges between such polarizations as have been bequeathed us by the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversies of the last century.

At any rate, we will have much to discuss in Anderson. I hope that the above facilitates our discussion. I would mention one last item. If we are able to consider Jeff's proposal seriously, we will need to consider the financial implications. In response to my questions I was told that we would be responsible for the expenses of our representative to either one or two meetings per year. These are scattered around the country (New York, Washington, San Francisco, Chicago, etc.).

Finally, I am not sure how much we need to discuss the matter of financing guests who are not on the program. I generally concur with the majority of the executive committee that we ought to be careful with the precedents here. I have no desire to push this issue at all--and suggested it originally only at the urging of Howard Snyder. Perhaps it would be useful to give some time to the clarification of a policy before it gets raised again, but it ought not to take much of our time.