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Barth, Visser 't Hooft address Student Meeting of the World's Student Christian Federation

(Strasbourg)—Karl Barth, famous Swiss Protestant theologian, kept 700 participants at a World's Student Christian Federation conference here alternately intent and hilarious in a two-hour question and answer session. The 74-year old Professor Barth came specially from Basle to answer questions sent to him by telephone in advance.

Asked how the mission of the Church on earth was related to the Kingdom of God, Dr. Barth said that the two were related but never identical. He said that the Church cannot replace, establish or achieve the purpose of the Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom of God is the work of God from above, the mission of the Church is obedience to it". He emphasized that the business of the Church was to reflect the reality of the Kingdom or rule of God, not to make it.

As a three-point guide to Christian political action Dr. Barth declared that "a Christian serving his master cannot be indifferent to politics", that he must beware of overestimating and "deifying" political programmes, and that Christians who take a political stand must do it with humility.

Two African students questioned whether Dr. Barth's estimate of political regimes was not influenced by Western assumptions that liberal democracy was best for human beings. He denied that he was on the side of one ideology against others and said they must all be tested by their capacity to put man ahead of "principles, interests or money". He said: "I am not defending a liberal democratic form of politics. What I have said applies to every form of government".

On participation of Christians in revolutions, Professor Barth said it "depends on the kind of revolution". He recalled that he himself had "taken a small part in the revolution against the Nazis in Germany" and that "many were involved as good Christians".

When asked if the preaching of the Christian message should include warnings about hell, Dr. Barth defined hell as a continued existence "in separation from God, one's neighbour and even one's inner self" and said it should not be part of the proclamation of the Gospel. He deprecated laughing about the terrors of hell, but said Christians who knew that Christ had beaten it should

turn their backs on it and leave it behind them.

He told the students: "Don't busy yourself with the devil, but make friends with Christ and cast him out as Luther did, perhaps with the help of a little ink—writing volumes of dogmatics for example". (Martin Luther is said to have thrown an inkwell at an apparition of the devil. Karl Barth is engaged on a huge multi-volume work called *Church Dogmatics*.)

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches called on the students to work for a new understanding of the nature of the Church in their local congregations all over the world. Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft said the job called for pioneering and "loyal opposition" because "the real sense of the Church has been lost in all our churches, even those which officially have a right conception of the Church".

He defended the biblical idea that the local congregation must prove itself to be the "place where the One Holy Church exists and does its work".

Saying that he did not speak in any official capacity, he said he believed that the great problem was "to make the Church think of itself as Church of Christ and not of this or that country or denomination".

The Dutch theologian said that it was not enough to feed people with information, though this was necessary. "Information can produce ecumenical activism", he said, "but it cannot build the One Church. For that we need not information but conversion. True preaching and Bible study will help us more than talks and brochures about the ecumenical movement. It is not true that the ecumenically enlightened have the answers in their pockets and that these answers have only to be communicated to the ecumenically under-developed masses in the pews", he said.

"Preaching is not a lesson in bourgeois morality or in living without pain", he said. "The local church is an earthen vessel, but he who looks for the pearl of great price will find the treasure in the vessel".

He deplored an attitude summed up in a verse he composed for the occasion:

"Oh, how I love the world-wide Church
With deep spiritual pleasure;
But I detest my church in town,
It bores me beyond measure".

Dr. Visser 't Hooft pointed out that "unity does not mean uniformity. Why should it?" he asked. "There was a real unity in New Testament times but at the same time what astonishing diversity between St. Peter, St. Paul and St. James, between Jerusalem, Corinth and Rome."

A silence of thanksgiving was observed for the unanimous UN Security Council vote on methods resolving the Congo crisis. The WSCF conference unanimously approved a cable to UN secretary general Dag Hammarskjöld supporting him "in every effort to bring to an end violence and destruction in the Congo, to work for the reconciliation of all groups and to help establish in this young nation the conditions of a new society, free, just and peaceful".

The Conference ended on July 31st with the "Covenant-Service" of John Wesley, conducted by the Rev. Samuel Selvaetnam of Ceylon.

The act of dedication came as climax in a programme described as the "key event" in a six-year study process set up to try to rediscover the meaning of "The Life and Mission of the Church" in the modern world. The Strasbourg meeting was preceded by a "Pilot Conference" in Rangoon at the end of 1958 and will be followed by regional teaching meetings in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and North America in the period 1961-63.

One of the aims is to train future leadership for the ecumenical movement.

Nearly 700 students attending the meeting from some 70 countries sat through 35 lectures covering all aspects of the mission of the Church. The first week set the stage with analysis of Christian teaching and historical background. In the second week lecturers faced up to ways of taking the Christian message to students, people without faith, Marxists, Moslems, industrial workers, "de-Christianised" populations and people in racial and cultural tension spots.

Theology Professor Hans Hoekendijk of Utrecht caused a stir by attacking "perpetuation of a structure of church life that cannot function in the modern world—the territorial parish".

Professor Hoekendijk said territorial parishes are "immobile and tend to be self-centred". He claimed they belong to the Middle Ages and need to be replaced in the industrial era by "small mobile groups" of people who see their real task as being in their daily work rather than the parish. He expressed alarm about current preoccupation with details of "liturgy" and the "terrifying increase of clerical collars" and urged students to "re-secularise the Church, which has become a sort of sacred temple".

"We should think of the Church as a very simple house with a very simple service", Professor Hoekendijk said.

Thirty-three "tutorial" groups under a team of international leaders met to discuss the lectures. Twenty "seminars" also held six sessions each to

deal with subjects like modern propaganda, big city problems, youth work, university evangelism, theological education, co-operation of men and women, peace in the atomic age, missions, art, refugees and relations with other world faiths.

Visser 't Hooft warns against accepting status quo

(St. Andrews, Scotland)—The churches must not accept the present status quo of their co-operation work, but must instead continue to search for "that far more perfect unity which we are meant to have", Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, said at the opening session of the Council's policy-making Central Committee, in session at St. Andrews from 16 to 24 August.

Dr. Visser 't Hooft said that at the same time the churches must not "force the situation by formulating a common goal representing the views of the majority". To do this "would be against the very principles of our movement".

The general secretary told the Committee that the churches' task is to decide "whether in the light of ecumenical conversation of the last 10 or 20 years we can now say more together about the nature and form of the unity we seek than we have so far said. In the early days of the ecumenical movement the great difficulty was to convince churches that they were not going to be committed to decisions which they were not prepared to take".

To-day, he continued, while there are still different views about the form in which to express church unity, church leaders have been able to come to agreement on statements about the nature of the unity they should seek.

Speaking of the Council's Commission on Faith and Order, Dr. Visser 't Hooft said the Commission's function is "to proclaim essential oneness of the Church of Christ and to keep prominently before the world and the churches the obligation to manifest that unity in its urgency for the work of evangelism".

Turning to a review of the ecumenical movement since 1910, Dr. Visser 't Hooft noted that the early pioneers of the movement were already aware that "co-operation is not a goal but a stage on the road to a goal". They were "deeply aware" of relationships between faith and order and "the missionary task of the church" and the fact that "mission points to unity".

The criterion for the World Council's membership acceptance of "our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour" is a statement which says "we do not stand for some vague undefined unity"