

## The Australian and New Zealand Protestant Churches in the Early Ecumenical Movement's Campaign for Global Order

---

John Nurser

**Abstract:** This article records the involvement of a significant group of Australian and New Zealand leaders from the Protestant and Anglican churches in the development of a growing sense of Christian contribution to social order on an ecumenical basis in the decades spanning the Second World War. All had a background in the Student Christian Movement (SCM). The formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1938 led to the formation of national Councils of Churches, a practical consequence of which were ecumenical Campaigns for Christian Order (CCO) in New South Wales and New Zealand. Attendance at international gatherings such as the Princeton Round Table in July 1943 gave impetus to a growing sense of independence from Britain and a confidence to strike out in new directions that paralleled similar tendencies on the wider national level. In particular, Bishop Ernest Burgmann's friendship with Labor Party statesman, H. V. Evatt was involved in the significant contribution made by Australia to the formation of the United Nations in the early post-war years and to its Declaration on Human Rights.

### I. INTRODUCTION: A GLOBAL ORGANISATION?

PROTESTANT "ECUMENISM", from its foundation before World War I, was by definition a "movement" of world-encompassing missionary Christianity, not dissimilar in that respect from the contemporary "socialist International".<sup>1</sup> The ecumenical movement is now commonly

---

1. The twentieth-century ecumenical movement had roots in the concern over denominational and national competition in the mission field, e.g., at the Kikuyu conference (1913), and in the developing global mission of the YMCA and YWCA. John Mott was a central figure; he linked the YMCA with the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), and in 1895, the World Student Christian Federation. See R. Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation: a History of the First Thirty Years* (London: SCM, 1948).

understood as an aspiration toward a one-church Christian community, but in origin it was equally (and consequentially) directed toward a one-world human family. Its increasing commitment to opposing racial and gender discrimination sprang in part from the stand taken by the post-Civil War American YMCA, a stance that became more explicit in the development of policy by the new International Missionary Council in the early 1920s under the leadership of its layman secretary J.H. Oldham.<sup>2</sup> This increasingly inclusive global self-consciousness is put into its contemporary perspective by the fact that, until at least the 1950's, Protestant ecumenism had a white male core-group, and its institutions were located in three western cities: London, New York, and Geneva. In the first years (1938 to 1948) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), while it was still technically "in formation", the churches of the rest of the world could be forgiven for thinking that they were regarded as provincial or "younger", even peripheral. The war years, bringing both the rupture of international civil-society contact and the rhetoric of "freedom", gave impetus to a more autonomous church consciousness in the various regions of world Christianity. The national ecumenical movements of Australia and New Zealand instantiate this, foreshadowing the giving and receiving that became the 1980's mantra of "mutual responsibility and interdependence" in the Anglican Communion.

Looking specifically at Australia and New Zealand – neighbouring dominions within the British Commonwealth – we can see they had much in common in their experience of World War II. Their traditions were clearly British in origin. Both had developed into aggressively egalitarian societies, with a strong commitment to "fairness", rather than to an Asian "harmony" or American "freedom". Trade unions were strong. Legislation for an eight-hour working day and for votes for women had been world firsts. But the leaders of their inter-war Protestant and Anglican churches were frequently British or Irish born, and all were theologically dependent on British publications. After Munich in 1938 their members saw the issues that sparked the Hitler war as necessarily leading to the involvement of their young men: it was a commitment of family honour, though London could not have been further away.

From December 1941, however, supporting "home" (i.e., Britain, e.g. in the Western Desert campaign) no longer had first claim. Survival meant an urgent and quite unfamiliar looking east across the Pacific, to military alliance with the USA. If the war against Japan could be won,

---

2. Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier* (Edinburgh and Geneva: World Council of Churches, T & T Clark, 1999).

another radical change was instantly clear: that it would be the height of folly to go back to ignoring neighbours more immediately at hand, whether ancient and populous Asian cultures or Melanesian islanders. It was exciting to think what the Australasian societies might then become. They could make authentic contributions to a much less Euro-centric “family of nations” – and, of course, of churches.

## II. SIX LEADING ECUMENICAL FIGURES

The Australasian contribution to this period of crisis and realignment centred around the careers of six leading and representative ecumenical figures: Campbell West-Watson; Wilson Macaulay; John Moyes; Ernest Burgmann; Alwyn Warren; Frank Engel. Five were long lived and had hands-on ecclesiastical authority in their territories for a generation, while Frank Engel exemplifies a less church-bound style of ecumenical leadership.

### 1. Campbell West-Watson (1875-1953)

West-Watson was born near Liverpool (England) and, as with many other ecumenical leaders, came from a mixed Anglican/Nonconformist marriage, his mother having been a Congregationalist. He was formed in the pre-World War I Cambridge tradition: a double-first degree, then theology at Ridley Hall (a liberal-evangelical theological college of the Church of England). Nominated as Bishop of Christchurch, NZ, in 1926, he was there until 1951, for the last eleven years also as Archbishop of New Zealand. Conspicuous concerns of his leadership were the promotion of indigenous church life among the Maori and in the South Pacific generally, tackling the problems of unemployment, and promoting in church life the ecumenical vision Student Christian Movement (SCM).<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Wilson Macaulay (1882-1951)

As Anglicans in that generation chose leaders from England, so Presbyterians valued British, normally Edinburgh, academic credentials. But in Macaulay’s case he was a Northumbrian, which meant his theological training was at Westminster College, Cambridge in the same years that West-Watson was teaching at Ridley. By this time English university theology had begun to be ecumenical, especially at

---

3. Colin Brown, *Forty Years on: a History of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand 1941-81* (Christchurch: National Council of Churches, 1981). See also Robin Boyd, *The Witness of the Student Christian Movement* (London: SPCK, 2007).

Cambridge, and the founding of the SCM in 1905 represented simply the recognition of what had become an established conviction. Macaulay's ministry in Melbourne began in 1910, in a city that was not only the centre of Presbyterian and SCM life in Australia, but also until World War II the *de facto* seat of Federal Government. Like so many Protestant clergy of his period, Macaulay was an active Freemason and, from its foundation to 1948, an executive member of the Australian League of Nations Union and its successor body the United Nations Association, taking particular interest in the UN's post-war work of "relief and rehabilitation". He was the first president of the Christian Social Order movement in Australia and Chair of the Australian Council of Churches (ACC). In the last years of World War II, when he attended the Princeton Round Table in 1943 (see below), he was serving as Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

### 3. John Moyes (1884-1972)

Both John Moyes and Ernest Burgmann (see below) were politically radical Australian bishops. They also sought a more consciously national inculturation of Christian faith – what after the 1960s was often called "gum-leaf Christianity". With contemporaries on the episcopal bench largely English-born, both were proud to have been born and raised beneath the Southern Cross (and away from the state capitals). Both were hugely influenced by the Australian SCM. Moyes had been student-president of the Adelaide University branch, and was to recall – like many others – that the SCM had introduced him to a Christianity "of grace and love" besides "law and commandments".

Elected bishop in 1929 by the sheep-farming diocese of Armidale in northern New South Wales, Moyes remained in that post for thirty-five years. Throughout that time he spoke and wrote frequently on economic issues as the chair (1933-1963) of the Social Questions Committee of the Anglican Church in Australia. He also succeeded Macaulay as chair of the ecumenical Christian Social Order Movement (1943-51).

### 4. Ernest Burgmann<sup>4</sup> (1885-1967)

Burgmann grew up in the dairy and forest country of the north coast of New South Wales. As a rather older student he attended Fort Street School in Sydney and then university (the first in his family to do so). In the post-World War I years, as Warden of St John's Theological College

---

4. Peter Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Bishop Burgmann* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

at Morpeth near Newcastle NSW, between coalfields and heavy industry, he – together with his Sub-Warden Roy Lee<sup>5</sup> – made the college a community whose *Morpeth Review* won a national readership, the secular media in particular relishing the Warden's "pink" political comments.

It was typical of Burgmann that he sought out leading academic and political figures, whether church-affiliated or not, to discuss what concerned him in matters of faith or public policy.<sup>6</sup> This led to wide-ranging friendships and correspondence. The minutes of the national SCM's office at Melbourne and of its conferences<sup>7</sup> show Burgmann as its consultant and regular platform speaker of choice through the 1930s and after.

Rather surprisingly, the country diocese of Goulburn, NSW, elected Burgmann as its bishop in 1934. The candidate's "mission-statement" saw "young and old being thwarted, damaged, and broken in the battle of life today, and I feel that it is the church's primary duty to bring the healing of the spirit of Christ into every department of modern life"<sup>8</sup> When World War II pumped life into the new seat of national government at Canberra, Burgmann decided to move his office there from Goulburn (as did also the Roman Catholic bishop).

#### 5. Alwyn Warren (1900-1988)

Warren was of the generation that reached manhood immediately after World War I, the other side of a divide. From a middle-class New Zealand family, he was sent from his home in Wellington to be educated in England, first at Marlborough, then to undergraduate study of chemistry (and enthusiastic college rowing) at Oxford, followed by theological training in the high Anglican tradition at Cuddesdon. His ministry, apart from war service as a chaplain in Italy, was to be for 32 years in Christchurch, where he was successively parish rector, archdeacon (as right-hand man to West-Watson), and bishop. His wife Doreen was a creative force in the growing salience of women's organisations in New Zealand's public life and in its churches. Warren was a practical man, effective on the university Council and skilled in managing new building-projects. He was also, at 6 feet 5 inches in

5. R. S. Lee was of half-Chinese ancestry and deeply knowledgeable in the field of Freudian psychology. He ended his career as Vicar of the University Church at Oxford.

6. Here Burgmann was following the constant concern of J. H. Oldham to meet and tap into "the best minds", whether Christian or not.

7. National Library of Australia (NLA), Australian SCM Papers, MS 980, Boxes 5, 81, 82. These papers need to be complemented by the monthly SCM journal, *The Australian Inter-Collegian*, where William Temple is a pervasive influence.

8. P. Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest*, 155.

height, an imposing physical presence. West-Watson gave him every opportunity to preach and write about the vocation of the ecumenical movement to foster an internationalist “global order”. At the 1943 Princeton Round Table (see below) he was appointed to the Guidance and Editorial Committees, and went on to become the World Council’s link-man with New Zealand.<sup>9</sup>

#### 6. Frank Engel (1911-2006)

Like many Americans prominent in the ecumenical scene, Frank Engel was born of missionary parents in the Far East, in his case in Korea. The second volume of his *Christians in Australia*,<sup>10</sup> is virtually an autobiography. His was the first generation of graduates for whom the ecumenical movement was already a reality. A comparable figure in New Zealand was Alan Brash (1913-2002),<sup>11</sup> another Presbyterian minister, who went on to become Deputy General Secretary of the WCC at Geneva 1974-78. Engel’s career was not within denominational leadership, but swung between responsibilities in the SCM (his first job was as General Secretary of the SCM in New Zealand) and in the Councils of Churches of south-east Asia and then of Australia. He was a pioneer in listening to the voice of Indigenous (Aborigine) Australians, and in recognising the urgency of finding a place for Australian Christians among their Asian neighbours. Another of Engel’s typically ecumenical concerns was to serve – unassumingly as ever – as secretary of the 1960s lay initiative “Australian Frontier”. Its intention was to nourish lay Christian vocations at work, in the tradition of J. H. (Joe) Oldham the inspiration of “frontier theology” in 1930s England, and of the post-World War II lay academies in Germany.<sup>12</sup>

The common thread in the distinctive ministry of these men was their growing participation in wider “global” thinking on so-called Life and Work issues. The Report of the 1937 Oxford conference that resolved to

---

9. From the WCC’s second Assembly at Evanston, USA, in 1954 to 1966, Warren served on the Council’s Central Committee.

10. *Christians in Australia. Volume 2: Times of Change 1918–1978* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1993).

11. Brash was in Britain as a theology student in 1937. He was an economical choice therefore (however junior) to represent his church at the Oxford and Edinburgh conferences that set up the WCC. See Alison O’Grady, *Alan Brash: Voice for Unity* (Auckland: Pace Publishing, 1991).

12. A. R. Vidler, an earlier secretary of Oldham’s “Moot”, edited the journal *Frontier* (London) throughout the 1950s. The British group “Christian Frontier” consisted of lay theologians in secular careers. The post-war WCC inherited the YMCA’s valuing of lay vocation. Its Department of the Laity (and associated Centre at Bossey) was centrally important; cf. Paul Tillich’s *Auf der Grenze*, translated by J. Heywood Thomas as *On the Boundary* (London: Collins, 1967).

set up a World Council of Churches (WCC)<sup>13</sup> was communicated as an internationalist programme, especially through the World Student Christian Fellowship's (WSCF) journal *Student World*.<sup>14</sup> The strength (and weakness) of the Australasian churches was their patchwork localism. A bishop lived in one place for many years with personal authority. He could read *Student World* and sustain a diocesan life that reflected his own views, usually neither affecting nor affected by outside opinion. Occasionally, what in the USA and England was only being talked about was actually put into effect. For instance, Anglican bishops in Brisbane and Canberra ordained men continuing in their secular vocations a generation earlier than did their counterparts in England. As Robert Withycombe has said, "diversity of opinion at home often took more concrete form in the colonies".<sup>15</sup>

### III. A "NEW ORDER" WAS NEEDED IN THE WORLD: IT SHOULD BE CHRISTIAN

Throughout the 1930s, as the crises deepened in China and in Europe, Australasian members of the SCM looked for an effective response. The distance between the state-capital university branches, making personal meetings very rare, meant that ecumenical publications, with their increasingly anti-fascist and internationalist editorial line, could have an uncommon influence. Moyes' first years as Bishop – even in his remote diocese – show such influence.

Virtually every policy-maker of substance in the twenty years after the economic catastrophe of 1929 declared it to be self-evident that the world needed a "new order" or (in the USA) a "new deal". It was the message of fascists and communists alike. In the Christian churches the phrase "Christian Order" entered the language of the WCC, and Pope Pius XII constantly spoke of it, specifically with reference to the requirements of Catholic social theology.<sup>16</sup> Moyes picked up this language in a remarkable address to the Armidale diocesan synod in 1934.

---

13. *The Churches Survey Their Task* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937). This volume consists of five reports of heads of section with an introduction by J. H. Oldham.

14. Willem Visser 't Hooft edited this journal, from a background of leadership in the WSCF and YMCA. He was General Secretary of the WCC from its inception in 1938 to 1966.

15. R. S. M. Withycombe, "Mother Church and Colonial Daughters: New Scope for Tensions in Anglican Unity and Diversity", *Studies in Church History* 32 (Oxford 1994) 430.

16. A key text was Etienne Gilson's *Pour un Ordre Catholique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1934).

His "charge" was a piece of over 7,000 words entitled *Adventure or Security*.<sup>17</sup> His reading that year had been impressive and up-to-the-minute. He cited Alfred North Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas* (1933) (which was also a key text for Burgmann), John Macmurray's *Freedom in the Modern World* (1932), Nicolas Berdyaev's *Christianity and the Class War* and *The End of our Time* (translated into English in 1933), together with some helpful recommended reading to clergy on changing patterns of family life. There was no mention of Karl Barth.

Moyes' over-arching thesis was that the selfish and materialistic capitalism of modern times is an enemy, but so is its mirror-image in communism, whilst "the church, by contrast, is of and for persons". In the face of a global economic crisis immobilism is "as real a sin" as revolution. To Moyes "poverty and distress no longer appear as accidents, but seem rooted in our system. Our hope of a surviving civilisation, and indeed of a living Church depends...on the formation of an order that shall incarnate the idea of the value of human life." Such a project will have to tackle "work": "its universal availability, the quality of its experience, and the distribution of its rewards". "So", finally, "let us build adventurously [God's] Kingdom, in the Church, the Home, and in the World of Commerce that knits the nations in one common whole."

#### Mobilising for Christian Order

Engel, who on graduation from Melbourne had become an SCM Travelling Secretary, wrote of the 1936 annual national conference as a turning-point: "There had been a tendency for Protestant students of a certain kind to make [the Movement] their substitute for the Church". But there was a "change to appreciation of the Church in all its weakness".<sup>18</sup> The SCM hosted international church leaders and sought student exchanges.<sup>19</sup> Nationalist aggressions in Europe as well as in China also brought the pacifist option within the churches into active debate. It was common for American ecumenical authors, in the run up

17. *Adventure or Security*, A charge: delivered to the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Armidale by John Stoward Moyes, Lord Bishop of Armidale, in the Cathedral Church of St Peter, Armidale, NSW, 4 June 1934, p. 20.

18. The Barmen Declaration (1934) against the Nazi "German Church" had a galvanising influence on Protestant opinion worldwide. See F. G. Engel, "The Shadow of a Second War", in M. Holmes and D. Garnsey (eds.), *Other Men Laboured: 50 years with the SCM in Australia, 1896-1946* (Melbourne: Australian SCM, 1946) 37.

19. The Perth branch began corresponding with C. F. Andrews (the colleague of Gandhi) in 1937. Indian SCM students replied coolly, not trusting Australian degrees and unwilling to condone the White Australia policy. But Subrij Lacore came from Lucknow Christian College in 1940. Minutes of Australian SCM Executive, 8 July 1937, NLA, SCM Papers, MS 980, Box 5.

to war, to picture humanity as facing a choice between “Christian order” and chaos.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, the World Council of Churches began in 1938 to set up its structures, and Australian members had to be found for its committees. In April 1939, presumably through his prominence in the SCM, Burgmann had an invitation from Henry Van Dusen,<sup>21</sup> the chair of the “world-wide ecumenical Study Program based in Geneva”, to become a “Collaborator among the Younger Churches” (a phrase which might not have amused him).

Both Australia and New Zealand produced “Campaigns for Christian Order” (CCO) in the early 1940s. The Australian campaign was the less effective of the two, being centred in New South Wales,<sup>22</sup> where the Anglican hierarchy in the state capital Sydney was unsympathetic. But in New Zealand the movement, consciously based on Oldham’s programme,<sup>23</sup> continued to be of consequence in national life until around 1947.<sup>24</sup>

We can find theological underpinnings of a holistic “Christian order” in Engel’s teaching. The theme of the study guide he compiled for his first major event as leader of the New Zealand SCM in May 1941 (when, incidentally, a collection was taken for Chinese students) was “Towards a New World”. As he draws its threads together, he stresses that Christians are committed to “demonstrate...the fundamental unity of all truth.... the fact that one believes that man is created in the image of God and that in spite of everything he is potentially a son of God, should show itself in one’s attitude to one’s patients, pupils, clients, parishioners, employees. More than that it should make a difference to one’s ideas as to what is the purpose of history, the aim of social reform, the true end of education, and of the legal system”.<sup>25</sup>

20. E.g. L. J. Shafer, *The Christian Alternative to World Chaos* (New York: Round Table Press, 1940).

21. Henry Pitt Van Dusen was president of Union Theological Seminary, New York, during the 1940s and a principal figure in the American ecumenical movement. He was a member of the Provisional (later, Central) Committee of the WCC 1938-1948.

22. The “Christian Social Order Mission” was inspired by William Temple’s contribution at Oxford in 1937 (personal communication from Frank Engel). Articles by Joan Mansfield give a rare account of this story: see “The Social Gospel and the Church of England in New South Wales in the 1930s”, *Journal of Religious History* (Sydney) 13 (1985) 411-33, and “The Christian Social Order movement 1943-51”, *ibid.* 15 (1988) 109-27.

23. Harold Turner, a New Zealand Presbyterian who had studied under John Baillie, was at the heart of the CCO. He wrote in the Campaign’s newsletter that J. H. Oldham’s *Resurrection of Christendom* was “the Campaign textbook...a semi-official statement of the [CCO’s] aims and policies” *Faith and Freedom* (Christchurch, 9 June 1942).

24. For an overview see *They met at Christchurch: Full Report of the Conference on Christian Order* (Christchurch: National Council of Churches, 1945). Interestingly, a decision of that conference was to found an NZ “Christian Frontier”.

25. NLA, Frank Engel Papers, MS 9073, Box 6, folder 2.

Radical activism was in the air. A special meeting of the Australian Anglican bishops, convened in November 1941 (three weeks before Pearl Harbour) to offer suggestions to the government's Reconstruction Committee, produced a list of desiderata that virtually preached revolution:<sup>26</sup> "present political institutions" had to be changed, and "the task of the Church is not only to perpetuate the teaching of Christ and convert men to his teaching, but it is also to make possible the conditions under which a Christian life can be fully experienced", and "the fullest development of personality is the highest end".

#### IV. THE PRINCETON ROUND TABLE: GIVING AND RECEIVING NEW ZEALAND'S EXEMPLARY ECUMENICAL CAMPAIGN

West-Watson and his ecumenical colleagues no sooner formed a New Zealand National Council of Churches (NZNCC) than they began in 1941 to prepare a Campaign for Christian Order (CCO) under its auspices.<sup>27</sup> Engel had arrived earlier that year to be General Secretary of the NZSCM, and was immediately co-opted to the project. It was a considerable extension of what local churches had previously understood to be the purpose of "ecumenism". In retrospect, it is remarkable how widespread was the public response to the campaign.

In spite of the recent very public collapse of British imperial power in southeast Asia, West-Watson had chosen the CCO as the principal topic of his Presidential Address to Christchurch Synod in October 1942.<sup>28</sup> He introduced it – remarkably at an Anglican diocesan event – as being an initiative of "the Communion forming the National Council of Churches", and began by locating the contemporary Christian community in history. Although it is now fashionable to deprecate the legacy of the Roman Emperor Constantine, West-Watson saw Christianity in the apostolic age as the beginning of "a new order" that, until Constantine's conversion, had no "opportunity for the application of Christianity to public and social affairs". So "with the Middle Ages a real attempt was made at a Christian Order in the continent of Europe". This failed; and its failure meant that the Church was "left more and more with the cure of souls, while the inspiration of man's social relationships and intellectual development sought expression elsewhere". This power of inspiration had to be won back. Some Christians are left happy with "an "other-worldly" outlook"; others

---

26. NLA, Burgmann Papers, MS 1988, Box 10, folder "Post-War Reconstruction".

27. In his monthly *Church News* of June 1942, p. 16, West-Watson spelled out ten points of his understanding of "Christian Order". A translation into Maori of the CCO Message follows immediately.

28. *The Yearbook of the Diocese of Christchurch*, 1942, 14-18.

(with whom he counts himself) are not prepared, when "the world today seems to be losing its soul", to "abandon the body to dissolution". He cites the "rising strength" of these "others": from Oxford 1937 onward, culminating in the American Federal Council of [Protestant] Churches' Delaware Conference "on a just and lasting peace" in March 1942, whose findings had clearly been communicated to the NZNCC. The CCO was not peddling anything unprecedented, West-Watson continued. The church had owned a "Christian order" since the day of Pentecost. She should be bold in entering the market "where "new orders" are being so freely prescribed".

There is drama in this serene address from a 67 year-old (type-cast in New Zealand as a "Cambridge don") to his diocesan family, delivered at the extremity of distance from London or Geneva and at a moment of unprecedented danger for his adopted country. It presents the core-standpoint of the ecumenical movement's leadership as it came to engage with post-war "global order".

The launch of the New Zealand CCO showed the fruits of careful organisation. An office was set up in the capital, Wellington, with a Presbyterian minister (F. H. Robertson) as Director. The bishop there (Henry Holland) was an enthusiastic supporter of the project, who succeeded in rousing interest among politicians and government circles. Some months were devoted to preparatory training of clergy and congregations and special lay "messengers". The NZSCM was naturally an enthusiastic ally. Its January 1943 conference, led by Engel, included in its addresses such topics as: World Order, The World Mission of the Church, Community in New Zealand, The Christian in Political Life, and The National Mission of the Church. After all that, for those with stamina, there were optional sessions on Science and Society, Religion and Culture, and Religion and Education.<sup>29</sup>

A Campaign "Message" was delivered across the country in March. The CCO published a leaflet for use by youth-club discussion groups in its seven sponsoring churches. Each of its exhortations was led with a punchy verb. There was widespread and sophisticated use of radio, with meetings broadcast from the four major cities followed by "additional radio programmes, which will be the most original and arresting propaganda yet put over in this country for the Christian message".<sup>30</sup> A regular CCO bulletin, *Faith and Freedom*, was launched. Lantern slides were produced for showing by local cinemas. Posters were produced in quantity. A booklet, *Towards Christian Order*, was "the

29. NLA, Frank Engel Papers, MS 9073, Box 6, folder 2.

30. *Youth Challenges Youth: Towards a Better Way of Life*, 8 pp. Published with heading "Christus Victor" by Campaign for Christian Order in New Zealand, n.d. [1943].

intellectual backbone of the Campaign". And, in an innovative move, a list was compiled of books recommended to back up the various themes being tackled, which was circulated to the public library system's accessions officers with the recommendation that gaps in their holdings be remedied.<sup>31</sup>

But what came to be seen as a weakness of the CCO was that it was so unspecific in its proposals for what should be done. West-Watson had been emphatic that though it "seems a kind of timidity or sitting on the fence", "we can and must draw a line of demarcation between what the Church does as the "Body of Christ" and what conferences or groups of Christians are called on to do". It is easy to recognise the SCM or the YMCA – even the WCC – as the "groups of Christians" of which he speaks. But if the CCO was to be an instrument of the New Zealand churches, how much freedom could it have to campaign for policies on public issues?

Many references in his monthly diocesan "Letter" show West-Watson retaining an optimistic internationalism. The church could not prescribe what the shape of post-war international order would be, but it had to play an active part, including a specific contribution of great value: "holding fast at all costs to its supra-national character and demonstrating practically that there is no insuperable bar to common thinking and common action between men of all colours, all races, and all nations". Unfortunately, "this vision of the Church is only beginning to dawn on many of our people. They have not realised the glory of their inheritance in the saints, their unity in Christ with the heroes of the faith in all ages, and with those who are facing persecution today rather than render to Caesar the things which, they are convinced, belong to Christ. They have hardly heard of Bishop Berggrav and the Bishops and clergy in Norway, of the brave stand of the faithful in Germany and Holland, of the renewal of the youth of Christianity by the younger churches, and of the missionaries [in Melanesia] who have heroically refused to leave their charges".<sup>32</sup> West-Watson believed that the "coming to consciousness" of global church unity is "the star which is shining brightest in the world's sky in this time of cloud and storm and gloom".<sup>33</sup>

In November 1942, Engel contributed a piece on "Christian Order in the State" to a CCO newsletter. He proposed a concept of "planning for freedom" in a world where there is a "steady trend toward public

---

31. Recommended authors included Martin Buber, Emil Brunner, Walter Lippman, Reinhold Niebuhr, F. R. Barry, Christopher Dawson, William Temple, George Bell, R. H. Tawney, Evelyn Underhill, and Leslie Weatherhead.

32. *The Yearbook of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1942*, 17-18.

33. Compare William Temple's consecration sermon as Archbishop of Canterbury (1942) and its reference to "the great new fact of our time".

ownership and centralised control” and in which “the greatest safeguard of freedom” lies in the “sacredness of personality in the Christian tradition”.<sup>34</sup> This “planning for freedom” was being promoted by the sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim, who, though not “a definite Christian”, was a member of J. H. Oldham’s informal think-tank, “The Moot”.<sup>35</sup> The sacredness of personality is central to its notion of a new “Christendom”. For Engel, the essence of “Christian Order” was the quaintly Scottish phrase, “leal love”, or “duty carried out from the motive of love”. All in all, little was left undone in leading the CCO that could be done by respectable men with a Protestant or Anglican church connection (and a vanguard of women led by Warren’s wife Doreen) talking sensibly in public.

#### The Call to Princeton

The invitation to the Australian and New Zealand Councils of Churches from the American Federal Council of Churches to attend a “Round Table” to be held on international affairs at Princeton in July 1943 was a favourable moment for both parties. For the Americans, to get participants from these two countries, with which traditionally there had been very little church contact, would bring at least a few genuinely representative non-American voices to discuss, and hopefully endorse, the provisional conclusions of their weighty Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace, chaired by John Foster Dulles.<sup>36</sup> The other non-American voices – with the exception of a handful of the ecumenical movement’s top brass from Europe – were distinguished, but largely wartime residents in North America. In order to make acceptance of the invitation physically possible, the U.S. State Department was asked to secure the agreement of General MacArthur to providing passages for the delegates on a military plane across the Pacific. For the American organisers it was useful, too, to have the leaders of the British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Councils of Churches present. After the Round Table they could make up an accompanying Commonwealth delegation to report on its findings to U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull.

For the Australasians, the offer was a precious chance to make contact with the world outside their theatre of war. In Australia there was a growing independent spirit that favoured meeting with non-

34. NLA, Frank Engel Papers, MS 9073, Box 6, folder 2.

35. See Marjorie Reeves (ed.), *Christian Thinking and Social Order: Conviction Politics from the 1930's to the Present Day* (London: Cassell, 1999).

36. See John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: the Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Georgetown and Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005) chapter 3.

British equals. In New Zealand there was the excitement of having something to show off to the world: their pioneering Campaign had begun well and provided good evidence of what a National Council of Churches could achieve.

Consequently, the reply to the invitation was an enthusiastic “yes” from both countries. West-Watson, the chair of the NZ NCC, sent Warren, his archdeacon and heavily involved in the CCO. Macaulay, the chair in Australia, agreed to go himself, together with Bishop Moyes, so that Anglican and Presbyterian, New South Wales and Victoria, could be represented.

The three senior clerics set off. The Liberator bomber had to be joined in war-zone conditions, and its unusual hitch-hikers had to get attuned to a strange world. Moyes insisted on making himself a couch on mailbags and, feeling the need for fresh air, opened a louvre in the plane’s side. As a result he was in intense pain with mastoiditis in his ear for the whole of the Round Table. The many accounts of their experiences each of them gave<sup>37</sup> show the impact these few weeks in North America had on them. For each it was a first exposure to American culture. To be personally welcomed as “ambassadors” for their national churches and to share in the drafting of a new world-order made it a heady time, accompanied by meetings and conversations, honorary degrees, sermons, and after-dinner speeches.

The Round Table itself had been well prepared, with documentation provided in good time. It more than fulfilled their expectations. The ideas being canvassed were not unfamiliar to the Australasian delegates. The unfamiliarity lay in the fact that they walked and talked with distinguished and experienced men of affairs who were active Christians of various denominations drawn from many different countries. They were given every reason to suppose that the US government treated this event with respect. Together the delegates came to a consensus on what ought to be the character of a post-war global order. This consensus was not just an agreement to a piece of paper, it was a commitment to enlist in a campaign that, as Christians from across the world, they were persuaded they might win. The Australians (carrying the burden of their national “White Australia” laws) were

---

37. Wilson Macaulay’s “To Princeton and Back (notes from the Moderator-General’s diary)” was published in the Presbyterian journal *The Messenger* in issues from October 1943 to June 1944. Briefer reports, “Princeton Round Table 1943: A Traveller’s Tale” were published in the Australian SCM monthly journal *The Australian Inter-Collegian* in November and December 1943. Bishop Moyes’ accounts appeared in an “attractive little booklet of 100 pages...the story of his recent visit to the U.S.A. and Canada”, as *American Journey* (Sydney: Clarendon Publishing, 1944). He also wrote accounts in September and December 1943 in the *Armidale Diocesan News*. His fullest account of this episode is in an unpublished typescript, “My Confessions – an Australian Remembers”, vol. 1, 83-105.

deeply impressed by the intellectual quality of the Chinese delegates. The new friendships and contacts with which they returned home were to prove invaluable.

It was not all one way: the report on his Campaign for Christian Order, which Warren brought with him, was circulated as a business paper to the members of the Round Table. It was used by the Dulles Commission as a successful model for its own campaign that autumn to produce an internationalist consciousness among American church people. These "outsiders" also raised salutary queries. Moyes more than once flared up at what he saw as the omission of any consideration of working-class issues in their discussions. In New Zealand, when reports from the meeting came back, there were prescient criticisms: "Does the Report overstress an American viewpoint of world problems and recommend a solution too coloured by American theological and ecclesiastical conceptions?" "Did the Conference explore what the Church of Rome was thinking and planning for World Order?"<sup>38</sup> This last question was pertinent in the sense that two planks shared by those churches that formed the WCC in the 1930s were a high doctrine of biblical authority and a low view of Roman Catholicism. Creating a worldwide ecumenical instrument was bound – consciously or not – to raise obsessive fears of imitating "Rome". Perhaps a "centre" could contain both a sophisticated common articulation of orthodoxy/orthopraxis and also the twin subsidiarities of regional and denominational institutions? This has turned out to be a difficult circle to square. The Princeton Round Table of 1943 was a first attempt to sketch an answer in the field of international affairs.

#### The "Reception" of Princeton

The three Australasian delegates were inspired in the way young artists used to be by a year in Paris. Those who remember their return say that their experiences and new standards of expectation coloured most of the opportunities they subsequently had for writing and speaking. The church in New Zealand was better prepared to receive the Princeton message than that in Australia. While leading figures in the Christian Order campaign were prominent in the Australian media and in university circles, among church leaders the message found only diffuse patches of support.

---

38. Canon A. H. Acheson had been a delegate with West-Watson at Oxford in 1937. His "Comments and Queries on 'Princeton'" appeared in the diocesan *Church News* of February 1944, p. 14.

The Christchurch *Church News* of October 1943 indicates West-Watson's presentation of Princeton to Synod. It was the principal agenda item. His address was brief, but what he said is of compelling interest:

Meanwhile we have a precious opportunity for moulding public opinion.... If the Atlantic Charter is to become a Magna Carta for the world,<sup>39</sup> it must be implemented in a noble and generous spirit. The Churches, with their world-wide contacts, occupy a privileged position for testing and weighing the various propositions which are made for reconstruction. Their scales are better balanced than those of any combination of victorious powers, for they have a living fellowship with brethren in enemy and occupied countries, and some communication is maintained with them even in war-time. The Statesmen and Warriors who are generally entrusted with the drawing up of the terms of a peace are limited in the lengths they may go by the temper of their peoples. We must try so to mould that temper that the men in authority feel that they are trustees on our behalf first of all for world order, rather than for any party, group or nation.<sup>40</sup>

Warren was asked to give the Synod sermon.<sup>41</sup> In it his experience of contact with a metropolitan Christian community at Princeton stands out. "What", he said, "impressed me while in America, is the great amount of interchange and coming and going, even in time of war, between the Churches in America, Great Britain and the Continent of Europe. All this helps to further a sense of fellowship, an experience which we in our far-off country find it hard to realize."<sup>42</sup> He went on to propose: "it is of urgent importance...that through [world-wide Christian fellowship] we take our part in providing for the Spirit of Christ the agency by which He may transform the world".<sup>43</sup> This gives a vivid insight into the influence of conversations that had taken place at Princeton. The post-war world order "must repudiate isolationism, and the monopoly of power by a few nations". He concluded with a call to action: "in 1918 the statesmen and politicians were unable to make a

---

39. This, on a formal public occasion, anticipated Eleanor Roosevelt's words celebrating the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

40. *Church News*, Christchurch, October 1943, 4.

41. "The Great New Fact of Our Time: the Dean preaches the Synod Sermon", *Church News*, Christchurch, October 1943, 8-9.

42. The novelty of their being equal partners, physically present together at Princeton, before air travel and the worldwide web, is at the heart of this paper.

43. See Oldham's insistence on specific policy-oriented structures if the churches were to be able to make an impact; see Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations*, 198.

peace which might have been just and lasting, because their people were not able to follow a lead when it was given. This time it is essential that we should educate our people."

Such an activist argument for community education was also being made in America and Britain and explains why, when Archie Craig of the British Council of Churches wrote to the NZNCC after Princeton, he should have put the "inspiring" Campaign for Christian Order in New Zealand alongside the contemporary British "Religion and Life Weeks". The Princeton texts were published (price one shilling) under the title *A Christian Message on World Order*, and commended by the editor of the Christchurch *Church News*: "Let this little book guide your thinking." When a few months later, as an army chaplain in Italy, Warren found no one had heard of Princeton, he could scarcely believe it and spread its word with urgency to eager hearers before he was wounded and returned home with an award for bravery. New Zealand Protestantism's early embrace of an ecumenical structure strongly committed to opinion-forming action in favour of "justice and peace" made for an exceptionally fruitful "fit" with the sudden opening to world affairs offered by the Princeton Round Table.

By the end of 1943 the Allied armies had begun to go forward. A conviction of eventual victory gave social permission to address post-war problems.<sup>44</sup> Most governments of the British Commonwealth became more assertive of their identity as the war was ending. The pioneer "not-via-London" contacts of the Australasian churchmen at Princeton and their visits to New York and other American and Canadian cities afterwards encouraged more self-confidence in the religious sphere as well.

#### V. MESSAGES FROM CANBERRA FOR THE POST-WAR WORLD

Bishop Ernest Burgmann played a significant role in two networks that were central to the making of the post-war world. As the leading personality in the Australian SCM (if not of the churches), he had been a natural candidate for the WCC to seek out as its representative Australian. In addition, he was able to exert influence as a long-time friend of leading members of the Labour government and as their neighbour in Canberra, still a small city at that time of less than 20,000

---

44. Popular enthusiasm greeted those, such as H. V. Evatt, a charismatic figure in the wartime governments of Australia, who spoke out on building a better post-war world. It is said that crowds followed Evatt everywhere during the war years because of his ability to kindle enthusiasm in this regard; see Peter Crockett, *Evatt: a Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993).

people. It was natural for him to contribute to their thinking as Australians about the shape of post-war international affairs.

#### Re-presenting the Christian Contribution

In 1941 Moyes and in 1942 Burgmann gave the Moorhouse Lectures in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne. Titled *The Regeneration of Civilisation*,<sup>45</sup> Burgmann's lectures were to be the ground of his later contributions. His letters to Van Dusen, the chair of the WCC Study Department, show his lack of clerical inhibitions. In 1942 he saw the concept of "church" as having an enduring role in human society on a par with that of "state". Christianity was but one particular manifestation of "church". However, "if, as we hold, the Christian form of Church contains more of God's truth than any other it should help us to present that truth if we can see its distinctiveness more clearly.... If it is superior we should be able to demonstrate it in action and thought". And "most of our theology is really mythology, and when we do treat it as theology we go off into word-spinning that has little relation to reality". The task is to find a way to "a better theology"; to get past the situation where "theology today is largely a worked-out mine", into *doing* things: "salting the working life with a religious sense", so that there could be some "raw material of religious experience on which the science of theology could get busy". Van Dusen responded in 1943 that Burgmann's thought on work as vocation "strongly reinforces a deep and long-time conviction of my own".<sup>46</sup> He also remarked on "the inestimable value" of Moyes's presence that summer at Princeton: "henceforth we shall concentrate largely upon trying to achieve a common Christian mind regarding the post-war world".<sup>47</sup>

#### Australia, the United Nations, and Human Rights

It was the WCC (and especially the World Student Christian Fellowship) that had taken the initiative in bringing Australasian church voices into its discussions of the post-war world, whilst the government of Australia demanded access in its own right to allied diplomacy and strategy. Its battering ram was Dr H. V. ("Doc") Evatt (1894-1962), Australia's Minister for External Affairs and also Attorney-General from

---

45. Privately printed Sydney 1943. See the critical review by John Anderson in the *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* 21 (1943) 182-84.

46. Correspondence between Burgmann and Henry P. Van Dusen, 10 July 1941 to 13 July 1943, NLA, Burgmann Papers, MS 1988, Box 12, folder "Universal Christian Council for Life and Work".

47. Coming from the chair of its Study Committee and the leading figure in the American ecumenical world, this is evidence of the strategic impact of Princeton.

1941 to 1949. His principal public servant was John Burton, son of a Methodist missionary and a member of the SCM. Evatt had a particularly close relationship with Burgmann as a fellow-nationalist, going back to student days at Sydney University. He led – abrasively – the Australian missions to Washington and London in 1942-3; and in 1945 at the United Nations Conference on International Organisation at San Francisco he led the middle-size states (including New Zealand) in asserting themselves against any continuing oligarchy by the four “sponsoring powers”. This was a powerful factor leading to the conference’s giving both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly far more prominent roles in the UN Charter than the draft texts had foreshadowed. A result of Evatt’s call for an effective International Court was the nomination of Australia as one of the 18 member-states of the UN’s Commission on Human Rights.

It seems likely that it was through Evatt that Burgmann found himself involved in a human rights study-circle. He received an urgent and surprising invitation dated 31 March 1947 from Julian Huxley, the newly-installed Director-General of UNESCO, to contribute as an “appropriate individual thinker” on human rights.<sup>48</sup> The UN Commission on Human Rights had indicated to UNESCO that it would be prepared to receive a paper from a “Conference of Philosophers” in preparation for the “Declaration of the Rights of Man for the entire world” that Huxley said was to be produced that very summer.<sup>49</sup> Burgmann submitted his paper in June. In line with most of the British Protestant and Anglican churchmen active in the ecumenical movement, he did not readily approach human rights from Paris 1789. Far from it. He positions himself with considerable care, advancing his fundamental contention that “if we are to speak to the whole world we must find a common ground of appeal. It may be sought in our common humanity or in a pictured goal to which all would subscribe”.<sup>50</sup>

In a remarkably creative way, he goes on: “if we cannot find a basis for human rights in what men are by nature, we might be more successful if we consider what they hope to become. There might be some possible agreement on the point at which they hope to arrive”. That would, however, depend on societies coming to own a common vision. Only then would we “be able to make a ‘Declaration of Human Rights’ with confidence”. It is a matter of faith and of myth. “Any

48. NLA, MS 1988, Burgmann Papers, Box 11, folder “UNESCO”.

49. It is odd that Burgmann and Elkin were nominated to this “conference of philosophers”. Neither was a professional philosopher, while Sydney University has had a distinguished tradition in (anti-clerical) philosophy.

50. “On Human Rights”, June 1947, 11 pp., NLA, Burgmann Papers, MS 1988, Box 11, folder “UNESCO”.

effective declaration of human rights...must speak to the heart of man, and at the same time satisfy the rational judgment of the thinking minority." He sketches what might be a constructive path forward. Such an approach was not easily acceptable to the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris at that time. It is now, however, very pertinent.

The human rights talk of many Christian intellectuals in the 1940s British Commonwealth world was of just such a "myth" – of the whole world coming to enjoy publicly guaranteed opportunities for personal growth, lifelong learning, work-satisfaction, artistic creativity, and humane relationships across boundaries of race, language, religion, and nation-states. But Burgmann had a more down to earth understanding of the immediate task: "Well-fed Americans and Australians may be very ready to sing the joys of freedom and proclaim the sanctity of equality and fraternity (with no particular thought of taking them too seriously), while hungry Europeans would feel they would barter large quantities of liberty, equality, and fraternity, if they had them, for a sure supply of daily bread." This point of view sat uncomfortably with the political science definitions of "democracy" current in the choice-oriented traditions in church and state from which American contributions came.

Evatt led his delegation to the first UN General Assembly in 1946. He was elected the Assembly's President for 1948-9. He was therefore in the chair during the extremely tense and complex debates leading to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was resolved *nem con* in Paris by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Evatt took a certain pride in involving church leaders in the international occasions when he strode the stage.<sup>51</sup> Burgmann was in digs in Oxford when he received a telegram from Australia House in London suggesting he attend the UN Assembly (together with Eris O'Brien) in Paris as an official adviser in the Australian delegation on the Human Rights sub-committee, beginning a week later on 1 October. The invitation was an honour. Congratulations came from the Australian Council of Churches and from his friend H. F. E. Whitlam, the Commonwealth Solicitor-General, who wrote "no ecclesiastic in Australia is more fitted than yourself for the work for which you have been selected".<sup>52</sup> Whitlam himself was currently writing a bulletin on human rights for the National Missionary Council.

That northern late summer and autumn of 1948 was a climactic experience for Burgmann. His eyes opened upon a new world – maybe

51. These leaders were personal friends. Eris O'Brien was the Catholic Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn; Alan Walker was a noted Methodist minister in Sydney; Wilson Macaulay of Melbourne was the Presbyterian, and Burgmann the Anglican of this "panel".

52. NLA, Burgmann Papers, MS 1988, Box 12, folder "UN (General)".

even upon the arrival of that “new order” which his friend Moyes had looked for in his 1934 charge. In quick succession, he attended his first Lambeth Conference and (with Alan Walker) the first Assembly of the WCC at Amsterdam; he had then been invited to play a part at the United Nations in his national delegation’s campaign for a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Eleanor Roosevelt was to call a new “Magna Carta”, this time “for all peoples and all nations”. Helping bring it to birth was the crowning achievement of the WCC’s work for “global order”.<sup>53</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The decade after the WCC’s foundation was traumatic. The world in 1948 was scarcely recognisable from that in 1938. A major change was the advent after Hiroshima of a globalisation that starts (paradoxically) from a pragmatic acceptance of pluralism. This holds for churches and religions too. The founding Protestant/Anglican ecumenists had believed, and then hoped, that western democracy and what Nathan Soederblom had called “evangelical catholicism” would become the civilisation and the accepted form of Christian truth for all mankind. Geneva, London, and New York assumed they would resource and monitor this process among “new” nations and “younger churches”. By 1945 this perception of apprentice nations and churches was no longer acceptable – not least in Australia and New Zealand. As a result, on the back of a more distinctive national consciousness after surviving Japanese aggression, they were able to make an unusually important contribution to global institutions. What is especially interesting is the role played in this transition by those laymen and leaders of the churches whose formation had been within their Student Christian Movements. They had been sensitised by the network of the World Student Christian Federation to the evil of various forms of fascism, communism and capitalism on the international stage, and the need for a better “global order” than the League of Nations was able to provide.

Burgmann himself illustrated the paradoxical need for an autonomous culture in a more global world. During his months in England in late 1948 he had taken special note of four institutions that modelled roles for which there had been no provision in provincial pre-war Australia: the Divinity Faculty of Oxford University, St Deiniol’s Library (Hawarden), Westminster Abbey, and St Augustine’s College

---

53. From 1944 O. F. Nolde had been empowered by the ecumenical movement to work for a global order based on human rights. See Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations*, *passim*.

(Canterbury). It was, however, now time for Australian Christians to equip themselves for their national (and international) future. He returned home obsessed with the idea of using his designated "cathedral" site in the Canberra Parliamentary Triangle for an altogether better purpose. In February 1957, against all the odds, St Mark's National Memorial Collegiate Library opened its doors with Burgmann as its first Warden, initially while still bishop. The tiny Anglican church of St John in Canberra (going back to the settlement's origins in the 1840s) contains a memorial to Evatt, emphasising Australia's contribution to the United Nations in which he played so significant a role.<sup>54</sup>

---

54. I acknowledge with thanks those who helped provide the resources to write this paper: in New Zealand Colin Brown, Geoff Haworth, and Christchurch Diocesan Archivist Jane Teal; Professor Greg Stanton of the University of New England, NSW, and the family of Bishop Moyes for access to Armidale material; the staff of the National Library in Canberra and Dorothy Bennett (née Burgmann) for permission to use her father's papers; the Australian SCM for permission to use their papers; Frank Engel and David Garnsey for the privilege of their friendship as well as the use of their papers; and those who supported me as second Warden of St. Mark's (1968-74) in succession to Burgmann, notably Laurie Murchison and Stan Davies.