

"Watchman, what of the night?"

"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

ECUMENICAL NEWS REVIEW FOR 1996

Editor's Preface

In this final issue for 1996, Darren Lambert, on leave from the Australian Foundation, has chosen key news releases from the Ecumenical News International (ENI) for this year, which reflect either the trends or the thinking in the areas noted in the headings. This news service is provided by the World Council of Churches and thus the choice of news items in each issue of ENI is of direct interest to the Council. The section "Jerusalem" reveals a consensus on two things: 1) Something must take place in the year 2000 in a move toward visible unity among the Churches and 2) the place for such a show of unity is Jerusalem. We no longer dare to ignore the prophecies given by our Lord concerning Jerusalem and their connection with the last of the last events which mark the end.

The news item on "The Virgin Mary" highlights the growing devotion to her in Romanism. However, the emphasis on Mary is not unique to Romanism. Just yesterday (10/16), we received through the mails a copy of a Church Bulletin used in a bilingual Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Texico Conference. In a section captioned a "Resume of the Teaching of the Scriptures," was this assertion - "All doctrines must be in complete harmony with the Holy Scriptures, as taught by Christ, and lived out in the lives of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John and the blessed Virgin Mary, leaving no room for the traditions or commandments of men."

With this issue of WWN, we have inserted a new Order Form. The prices on some of the items have been raised. We have held to the low cost rate as long as possible. The postage rate is gauged by the weight of publications should the whole order be publications. Naturally, for an order that is primarily made up of cassette tapes, this rate is unduly high, so we will try to compensate for this weight difference in orders received.

Besides the insert, we are stressing the offer as outlined on page 5. One has only to read the new book by Bernstein - *His Holiness* - to know that the whole world is "wondering" after the "beast." When the devil appears as Christ, and is welcomed by "his holiness" will those who are expecting the return of Jesus know who has really come? They will not unless they are convinced by the Word of God who the one is who is leading the way in the worship of the "antichrist par-excellence." Bernstein has described Pope John Paul II as a "mystic" who believes that he possesses the gift of the Spirit. Does not Paul relate that "that Wicked" one comes energized by Satan? See II Thess. 2:8 Gr.

The light is breaking at the end of the tunnel of human history. Jesus soon will come. We close this year with many events of significance breaking upon us. What lies just ahead, the months of 1997 will tell. Let us watch and be ready.



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CHURCH UNITY (IN DIVERSITY?)

Speyer, Germany, 21 February

A prominent German Roman Catholic has called for the "institutional reunification" of the Catholic and Protestant churches..... Norbert Greinacher said that while there needed to be some form of church authority at the world level, this should not be a "petrine service" of the type exercised by Pope John Paul II. The two main Christian traditions - Roman Catholic and Protestant - needed to work together ecumenically on issues such as that of creating a new world order, Greinacher said. A leading German Lutheran theologian (Wolfhart Pannenberg) has said that Protestants should be ready to accept the role of the Bishop of Rome as "first among equals". ENI Bulletin -96-0128

Sydney, Australia, 1 March

The general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia, David Gill, has said, "I find that there is great trust, understanding and commitment among church leaders.....There is a lot happening at the local level in Australia. People are using their brains and saying their prayers and getting together to find new ways of embodying unity." Gill was one of the people instrumental in forming the new National Council of Churches which came into being 18 months ago. It replaced the Australian Council of Churches with a structure which for the first time included the Roman Catholic Church. Though there were some reservations on the part of the Protestants about including Roman Catholics, Gill said he did not have to fight any great battles on that score. "The inclusion of the Roman Catholic Church has been a great gift for relations between the churches," he said. The Catholic Church is now the country's biggest denomination, representing just over a quarter of the population;... ENI Bulletin-96-0156

Geneva, 24 April

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) has made a passionate appeal for Europe's Protestant churches to put aside their remaining national and confessional differences. Konrad Raiser said that Europe was rapidly moving towards a situation "where the traditional distinctions between different Protestant churches become irrelevant....." More than 90 of the WCC's Protestant member churches throughout Europe were already in full communion with each other,..... He called on Protestant churches to move to a "new level of ecumenical understanding" and "relegate their remaining differences to a secondary level". ENI Bulletin -96-0230

Geneva, 20 June

The main Christian traditions should start talks in the year 2000 to settle outstanding differences, including the role of the papacy, according to an ambitious plan unveiled by the general secretary of the World Council of Churches. Konrad Raiser called for these Christian traditions to agree to a series of proposals to strengthen church unity, which should include allowing married couples who belong to different churches to receive the Eucharist in their partner's church. Raiser's proposals were first outlined in April this year at a major ecumenical symposium at Trier, Germany, in the presence of Cardinal Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity. Raiser proposed that the major Christian traditions should start a binding process - which he described as a "conciliar process" - to prepare for a universal council. "The proposal holds fast to the belief that a council in the full sense can only meet if the participating churches can together confess the faith and celebrate the Eucharist together." One of the central issues to be settled as part of this process, Raiser said, was the question of the primacy of the Pope. Last year, in his encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II invited non-Catholic churches to help him find a form in which the primacy of the Bishop of Rome could be exercised in a form acceptable to everyone. ENI Bulletin-96-0317 and 96-0405

Geneva, 27 June

Milan Opocensky, the general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), has stated that he fully supports the proposal of Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the WCC and one of the world's leading ecumenists, that the main Christian families of churches should start preparations at the beginning of the next millennium for a universal Christian council to resolve the issues dividing the church. "The year 2000 is a special opportunity for Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal Christians to begin a process leading to a universal council. The ultimate goal of such a council is a common confession of faith and the celebration of the Eucharist together," Opocensky said. "The end of the millennium is an invitation for celebration and repentance. The long years of separation and division should not hinder Christians from starting the conciliar process soon." ENI Bulletin-96-0346

Moshi, Tanzania, 13 August

Mary Tanner, moderator of the Faith and Order commission, said that an "ecumenical convergence" on the role of the papacy was possible if churches responded positively to Pope John Paul II's encyclical on church unity. Tanner described the Popes invitation to other churches to discuss the issue of papal primacy as an "important and timely opportunity". She also stated that "If our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers tell us that the communion of particular churches with the church of Rome, and of their ministers of oversight with the Bishop of Rome, is in God's plan an essential requisite of full communion, then it is incumbent on all of us to engage with that challenge, whatever our own tradition. ENI Bulletin-96-0455

Rome, 21 February

Konrad Raiser of WCC, has urged churches to look upon the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ as an occasion for cooperation and unity..... Raiser said in Rome that Pope John Paul's apostolic letter on the year 2000 - *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* - had "begun to kindle the imagination". The WCC general secretary said that the Pope had also suggested an encounter on Mount Sinai between Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders, representing the three faiths following in the tradition of the prophet Abraham..... He continued by saying that the churches are caught in a framework of rules and norms which have been formulated over centuries to justify and maintain separate identities. They are the victims of false utopias which are in danger of being perverted into instruments of power. "An ecumenical vision that can inspire new commitment and can generate hope must break out of these constraints." ENI Bulletin-96-0103

Prague, 18 March

The Vatican is "re-considering" the case of Jan Hus, the Bohemian reformer who was executed in 1415 as a heretic, but is not planning to rehabilitate him, according to a spokesperson for the Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. Jan Hus was the rector of Prague University, and was put to death after being summoned to Constance on a pledge of safe conduct to explain his teachings. He was burnt at the stake. Several Roman Catholic experts have urged Pope John Paul II - who, during a visit to Prague in 1990, spoke of Hus's "personal integrity of life" - to condemn the treatment of Hus. They said that this would help to overcome continuing tensions between Roman Catholics and Protestants. ENI Bulletin-96-0169

Geneva, 19 September

Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, has been reappointed by its central committee to a second five-year period of office. Raiser, a theologian and member of the Evangelical Church in Germany, was elected general secretary by the central committee in 1992, and assumed his post in Geneva in January 1993. His first term of office expires at the end of 1997. Konrad Raisers reappointment means he will hold the post until the end of the year 2002, which is likely to be a pivotal time in the life of the WCC as it renews and rethinks its role. Announcing the election, the central committee's moderator said that Dr. Raiser had "the full support of the central committee as he continues his responsibilities as general secretary at this crucial juncture of the history of the ecumenical movement in general and of the World Council of Churches in particular". ENI Bulletin-96-0546

PAPAL PRIMACY

Rome, 15 March

Pope John Paul II may be considering changing the "Petrine primacy", a principal obstacle to unity between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches, according to comments by a senior cardinal in Rome. Cardinal Angelo Sodani, Secretary of State at the Vatican, has told an Italian newspaper that while Pope John Paul II has stated that the "mission of Rome" could not be changed, the Pope had "taken note" of requests from other religious leaders to find a "new form" of exercising the Petrine Papacy which would be open to a "new situation". ENI Bulletin-96-0166

Paderborn, 5 June

A leading German Protestant has strongly criticized essential elements of Roman Catholic teaching about the role of the Pope....., but Richard Frieling also suggested that Protestants might be able to accept a scaled-down role for the Pope. Frieling said he could imagine "communion with, but not under, the Pope", and that while Protestants believed in the need for a global framework for church unity, Christian truth could not be represented by a single person or by a single institution. "Peter was no pope, and the Pope is not the only Peter," Frieling said. Communion with the Pope would be possible for Protestants, only on the basis of a common understanding of the Gospel and provided the Vatican did not require non-Roman Catholics to accept papal infallibility. However Frieling also said that Protestants could imagine a situation in which the Pope, as the leader of the biggest Christian church, took initiatives for the whole church and - in special situations in consultation with other churches - spoke for the whole of Christendom. ENI Bulletin-96-0301

Detmold, Germany, 20 August

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches has been told that there is growing concern about the "unique and certainly questionable" status enjoyed by the Vatican at the United Nations..... According to Robert F. Smylie, official observer for WARC and the Presbyterian Church(USA) at the UN headquarters in New York..... No other religious body - Christian or otherwise - has the same status or privileges as the Vatican which is recognized at the UN as a sovereign state. The Pope has an automatic right to address - as head of state - the UN general assembly, and the Holy See has full rights to participate and speak at UN meetings. "This arrangement for voice but no vote allows the Vatican to influence debate at the highest level, and to use its leverage with other states that have been traditionally 'Catholic' in identity, politics or history. Yet the Vatican bears no responsibility," according to Smylie's report. Smylie also acknowledged that it was difficult for other religious groups to raise the issue publicly for fear of being accused of "sour grapes". WARC's communications secretary, Paraic Reamonn said "The territorial independence of the Vatican is in itself a good thing. It symbolizes, and is intended to guarantee, the independence of the Roman Catholic Church. But the Vatican uses its unique position to try and impose on the UN a moral agenda that is rejected by an increasing number of Catholics, while contributing nothing to the costs of the UN. This is an abuse of privilege." ENI Bulletin-96-0489

JERUSALEM

Jerusalem, 23 January

The Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem has expressed the firm hope that Jerusalem, known as a city of peace, would become a "symbol that could change our present world, the starter of the new order". Bishop Samir Kafity, a prominent Palestinian called Jerusalem the mother not only of the Christian Church, but of Judaism, and Islam as well. The holy city, he said, was "a mother who loves all her children equally and alike. She loves her three children, the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. She has no preference. "We pray that it may once again be the answer to the quest for peace," Bishop Kafity said. "May it be a city completely shared in every respect and at every level by Jews, Muslims and Christians - including a sharing of sovereignty." "The full-time vocation and comprehensive calling" of Christians, Bishop Kafity said, "is to be peace-makers. Not peace negotiators or peace-keepers, but peace makers." He defined a peace-maker as "one who loves self and the other equally". [ENI Bulletin-96-0061](#)

Jerusalem, 23 January

Fresh from conversations in Rome with Pope John Paul II, the Latin (Catholic) Patriarch of Jerusalem told an ecumenical and international conference in Jerusalem on 22 January that the Vatican wanted Palestinians and Israelis to agree on the question of who has sovereignty over Jerusalem. [ENI Bulletin-96-0062](#)

Jerusalem, 24 January

The minister for Jerusalem affairs in the Palestinian National Authority told an international conference here on 24 January that if negotiations with Israelis succeed "the warm sun of Jerusalem will shine across the whole Middle East." But Faisal Hussein warned: "If we fail, Jerusalem can also be the 'black hole' of the Middle East - swallowing everything including the peace process". Geries Khoury, director of the Al Liqa Center for Christian-Muslim dialogue, told the conference: "I cannot be a Palestinian Christian, or a Christian Palestinian, unless Jerusalem is my capital". He quoted United Nations resolutions calling for a special status for Jerusalem. Canon Naim Ateek, founder of the Palestinian Liberation Theology Center said "it is essential to understand that what makes Jerusalem great is not its political character. It is rather its religious character which is equally important to Jews, Muslims and Christians. That is why it is mandatory for political sovereignty to be shared. We can either make Jerusalem a city of perpetual strife or we can make it a paradigm for peace." [ENI Bulletin-96-0063](#)

Jerusalem, 30 January

At the end of a five-day conference on the future of Jerusalem, the gathering of representatives of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches worldwide said that Jerusalem must "remain undivided and serve as the capital for two sovereign and independent states, Israel and Palestine". [ENI Bulletin-96-0081](#)

Detmold, Germany, 19 August

The world's main Christian traditions are hoping to organize a "truly ecumenical" celebration in Jerusalem to mark the new millennium, the general secretary of the WARC has revealed. Milan Opocensky said that a meeting in Geneva earlier this year of representatives of Christian World communions - including the Roman Catholic Church - had agreed to approach the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and other churches there to organize a meeting in Jerusalem "initiated by the oldest local church and which would have from the outset a truly ecumenical character". WARC's president, US theologian Jane Dempsey Douglass, said she had "never been able to grasp fully the mystique of the turn of the millennium which was so prominent a thousand years ago and is re-emerging now. It has even affected secular America," she said. However, it could "stand as a marker that time is running out", and that it was necessary to set priorities, she said. "In this sense, I can accept the urgency that it is now time - after 2000 years - to set our hearts on making the unity of Christ's whole church visible." [ENI Bulletin-96-0488](#)

THE VIRGIN MARY

Paris, 7 June

The Tour de France bicycle race, which is France's most publicised annual sporting event, was overshadowed by media coverage of a religious "tour". The Tour de la Vierge Marie included 108 statues of the Virgin Mary - each contained in a glass "mammamobile" pulled by a car, and made their way around France's Roman Catholic dioceses. Edmond Fricoteaux, a solicitor from Baillet-en-France, said that he had been "inspired", during a visit to Rome in 1982, to raise the Virgin Mary's profile in France. "I was a lukewarm Catholic until the day I heard Cardinal Gantin in Rome, but I got up from my seat filled with love for the Virgin... Shortly afterwards, I recieved a letter from a student who had had a 'vision' of 99 statues of the Virgin Mary - one for each diocese - coming to Baillet-en-France." This gave Fricoteaux the idea for the tour of replica statues, including nine extra statues of the Virgin from French speaking parishes overseas. He then recruited 108 volunteer drivers. One of them, Catherine Le Gall, an office manager who gave up her job when she heard of the project, said "People thank us. We allow them to rediscover prayer. For them, seeing the Virgin Mary is a lot less difficult than going to mass." Fricoteaux says that the tour will not come to an end on the 8th September. He is already planning a world tour of the Virgin Mary which will end on the 24th December, 1999 in Bethlehem. [ENI Bulletin-96-0303](#)

The SIGN of the End of Time & Anti-Christ - Who Is He?

Fallen angels upon earth form confederations with evil men. In this age anti-christ will appear as the true Christ, and then the law of God will be fully made void in the nations of our world. Rebellion against God's holy law will be fully ripe. But the true leader of all this rebellion is Satan clothed as an angel of light. Men will be deceived and will exalt him to the place of God and deify him. But Omnipotence will interpose, and to the apostate churches that unite in the exaltation of Satan, the sentence will go forth, Therefore shall her plagues come in one day...."
(TM, p. 62)

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KEY PUBLICATIONS

— The Hour and the End, An in-depth study on the same subject as "The Sign of the End Time" booklet.

— Facts of Faith An excellent source book with valuable documentation, for the alert Bible student.

— A Warning and its Reception, What really happened at the 1888 G.C.? What has the SDA Church done since then with the message of "Righteousness by Faith"?