

60 FORTH AND ..... WHAT? REFLECTIONS ON THE  
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES TRANSNATIONAL  
CORPORATION PROGRAMME

By Reginald Herbold Green

Inasmuch as ye have done it  
Unto the least of these my bretheren  
Ye have done it unto me -

I.

Prolegemenon

These remarks are not a summary nor a critique of the WCC consultations and their product. Neither in any systematic sense are they an apologia for them - in either the popular or the technical meaning of that term. However, four remarks on the Consultations and the Action Programme as approved by the Central Committee may be useful:

1. The Consultations were an exercise in exploration through dialogue. That dialogue sought partial synthesis and partial compromise but was unable to achieve full synthesis and rejected purely expedient or dissent removing compromise when deeply held divergences in principle stood in the way of unanimity.
2. The ongoing results of the Consultations are very much incomplete and imperfect - seen through a glass darkly. This is not the result of individual sloppiness so much as of individual informations and insights all much clearer and much less complete than the combined product. One dissent has been distributed - at least half the participants could also have dissented from a wealth of different stances some challenging the report as untrue to Christianity because it is neither condemned harshly enough nor issued a clear trumpet call for change, others querying whether the attempt to relate theology and action was adequately handled (or even appropriate) ... the list could continue for longer than the total time for these remarks.
3. The challenges posed for Christians and Churches were seen as part

of the struggle for justice in history not of the nature of divine justice beyond history. The response perceived as appropriate was prophetic. Prophets have rarely been given to detailed footnoting or to elaborate "on the one hand ... but on the other" balance. Nor - at least when confronting hostile or indifferent audiences - have they been concerned with avoiding harsh words or overly interested in offering easy "broad front" compromises. Most of the Consultation participants, rightly or wrongly, saw their duty in this context, primarily in terms of the prophetic tradition not the pastoral nor the intellectual nor the eschatological - a vision which informs the Report.

4. The Report is neither a reformist nor an apocalyptic document. It certainly rejects the view that transnational corporations are necessarily dominant, necessarily powers for good and need much more understanding plus a little more guidance as to the occasional, minor harmful side effects they may engender. However, it is hardly any more sympathetic to any appeal to instant violence against TNCs as the embodiment and driving force of the powers and principalities of darkness. Both viewpoints were represented at the Consultations but the real dialogue centered on different themes
  - a) how much change can reasonably be expected from self-transformation of TNCs?
  - b) how pervasive and serious are exploitation, oppression and exclusion associated with, and making use of, TNCs whether willed and sought by them or not?
  - c) in what contexts could TNCs be caused to contribute more, and to obstruct less, toward the achievement of a Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society?
  - d) how, if at all, do actions to change contexts require specific struggle with TNCs, by whom and where?
  - e) in what way can we avoid confusing the pastoral concern for individuals affected by TNCs (whether as beneficiaries, victims, or decision takers - not necessarily exclusive categories) and the prophetic duty to speak the truth in respect to power, distribution and justice? To fall into such confusion can lead to evident absurdities such as denouncing all human beings working in TNCs at managerial level with bell book and candle or supposing that specific actions to assist victims without any parallel action to change contexts is either adequate to

overcome the perceived evil or morally complete.

- f) what, if any, <sup>thing</sup> should Christians and organized Christianity think and do? As to description? Analysis? Prescription? Mobilization? With whom?

## II.

### The Nature of TNCs And The Nature Of Action

TNCs - in their own terms as much as those of their critics - are large organizations designed to achieve production, profit and power to protect that production and profit. They necessarily have and use power because without it they can neither produce and achieve surpluses today nor reproduce the conditions necessary to do so tomorrow. TNCs relate to each other both directly in terms of intrafirm affairs and more generally in constituting a distinguishable segment of the productive and power systems. They are not independent of contexts (social, political, productive, ecological) nor limited in operation to any single narrowly defined context. That much is fairly common ground among most TNC actors and outside observers, advocates and critics. From it would appear to flow certain implications for the nature of any action programme to reform or transform, condition or constrain the actions and impacts of TNCs.

1. It is fatuous to expect appeals to "the general welfare" (even supposing that is itself a useable political action concept) to change TNC actions, but equally facile to suppose TNC efforts to produce in a way attaining a surplus (profit) and safeguarding its future reproduction (future chance to make profits) are always and in all ways damaging to all beyond owners and managers. TNCs by their nature are set up to achieve profit through production (including production of sales which may or <sup>may</sup> not be seen by outsiders as adding anything to real goods and services) and must do so to survive. In this their suppliers, workers and customers have interests not totally dissimilar to their owners and managers - it is often much better, as Joan Robinson remarked, to be exploited efficiently and intensively than to be excluded or relegated to the margin of attention.

However, actions to produce or reproduce surplus may serve other ("broader") goals. British American Tobacco has paid for extension services to citizen tobacco growers, guaranteed them markets

and prices, furthered rural development; Shell has urged joint ownership (50-50) of distribution companies on both conservative and radical Third World states and provided the new joint ventures with interest free product loans. Why? BAT saw its actions as critical to ensuring stable, predictable cost tobacco supplies. Shell viewed joint ventures as safeguarding future profitable deployment of knowledge and technology (as well as physical or financial capital) and the product supply concessions as business contract negotiation heads to help achieve a saleable (and profitable) package deal.

The results of these BAT and Shell actions have in some cases served the interests of Third World peasants, workers and societies. They are none the worse because they also served the interests of BAT and Shell - at least they are not if the division of gains was at the time reasonably fair and if no better alternative was realistically open to workers, peasants and states. One need not go to the extreme of accepting any "invisible hand" variant to see that the quest for profit may lead to benefits to others than the profit - seeker and one need not sanctify profit to justify taking advantage of such situations.

2. It is neither plausible nor Christian to ignore - much less to deny - the importance of production and of surplus as a means to expanding production. The real issues are by and for whom, of what and under which conditions (production relations). An unbiased reading of the whole of either the Old or the New Testament should leave little doubt that there has been an abiding concern with bread (even if not with bread alone), with making two blades grow where there was one before, with distributive justice in this world, (eg. the "acceptable year of the Lord") and with "industrial relations" (eg. the labourers in the vineyard and their flat rate employer).

To be an advocate of zero growth and equal distribution of production may be admirable but hardly operational. To advocate zero growth and existing income and wealth distribution is to support the permanent denial of distributive justice - a prescription for the escalation<sup>of</sup> repression (and its intellectual "justification") and revolution (and the sanctification of violence as cathartic and liberating as well as functional).

TNCs are about production and reproduction. Indeed - especially if one includes their socialist and state capitalist variants - they account for and/or control the bulk of world production and surplus. Further TNCs do seek to raise production in order to raise present and future profits. To that extent they are not merely not irrelevant to making goods and services more widely available - they are - at least potentially - a critical contributor to achieving that end.

However, real problems (whether they be inherent contradictions or something lesser) do exist. Production for profit is inherently and inevitably tied to existing patterns of income and wealth and normally reinforces them. Production by high technology often inherently raises costs, reduces employment, limits beneficiaries (eg. soap in East Africa) not because of evil intent but because of what TNCs can and cannot do. Large, centralized decision taking and power exercising systems (including TNCs) tend to exclude and (even if unintentionally) to oppress while surplus amassing and allocating systems (including TNCs and tax authorities), if successful must exploit in the technical sense and are prone to doing so in the popular sense as well. These characteristics are exacerbated when TNC headquarters and principal beneficiaries are in one state and territory and many of the "lesser" employees, customers and suppliers in other states and territories and yet further exacerbated when the headquarters is in a strong, wealthy state/territory and many of the branches in weak/poor ones.

3. It is not plausible to expect TNCs to become general planning agencies consulting all social formations, classes and interest groups locally, nationally and globally and acting on some platonic balance of needs and interests synthesis. Indeed it is somewhat odd that the concept should - granted in vaguer form - ever have become so widespread among liberal and social democratic critics and corporate defenders.

TNCs have specific goals and means of attaining them which are quite different from those of communities, classes, states or religions. They are neither omni - purpose institutions nor human beings with

consciences and moral standards. (Indeed, if one believes human beings to be imperfect and fragmented representations of the divine and to act as they do because of the divine presence as well as the imperfections and fragmentations, to treat a TNC as a person would appear to be quite literally setting up and bowing down to a graven image).

This is not to argue that the morals and values of decision takers do not inform - or at least constrain - their decisions. They do but in a very special and attenuated way. Anyone acting on behalf of others (at least if he is to continue to do so) pays a single minded attention to their interests he would - if he has a "tender" conscience - be very slow to pay to his own. The dilemmas posed by Lord Acton and more particularly, Reinhold Niebuhr (Moral Man and Immoral Society) are perhaps even more apposite to TNCs than to states because of the narrower groups and interests to which decision takers owe allegiance.

What TNCs do respond to are contexts - institutional and moral, political and intellectual. To fail to do so is to fail to protect future profit. The successors to the slave trading merchant adventurers of West African termed themselves the "legitimate trade" even when they were "converted" slavers, not because they had had Damascus Road conversions but because the context had changed. BAT set out to secure local tobacco production over 1940-1950 not because of any manager's personal dedication to broadly based rural development but because, in the context of British Empire exchange control, such production of tobacco was critical to production of cigarettes and profit. Shell has not trained many hundreds of Third World executives from dedication to participation or to demonstrate a commitment against racism (any more than it is involved in fuelling Mr. Smith and the occupation forces in Namibia from any commitment to compulsory racism or any dedication to the interests of the Afrikaaner state's decision takers). It does so because, in the context of Third World education and world salaries today, it is profitable to do so and in that of Third World nationalisms and labour relations it is dangerous to the future reproduction of profits not to do so. (Similarly, while profits in Zimbabwe or Namibia may be trivial - and their reproduction endangered by present actions - those in South Africa are substantial and the

life expectancy of the present regime such as to make it critical to their reproduction.)

4. Changing TNCs is, therefore, a matter of changing contexts. (Eliminating them - especially in their broader sense as large scale production and surplus generation units within capitalism, state capitalism or a transition to socialism - is rarely on action agendas for this century, and particularly not in the UK.) That involves both causing TNCs to act differently in their own interests because to do otherwise would no longer be consistent with achieving and maintaining profits, causing them to shift from certain forms of ownership and control because these no longer pay and constrain them to retreat from some areas or types of activity because these have been made dangerous to overall surplus generation and its future reproduction.

That is a prescription for struggle, dialogue, negotiation and confrontation not for conversion, agreement, unity of goals and total rapprochement of Church and Corporation. It may be a prescription for violent change in some contexts and given some TNC responses but by no means in all. To see British TNCs as uniformly acting like Grunwick (which-whatever the rights or wrongs of other issues-chose to escalate confrontation in a way making violence virtually inevitable) is as much a caricature as to see the advocates of worker directors as the British counterparts of the Khmer Politbureau, the heirs of Blanquisme or even very faithful interpreters of the legacies of the Levellers, David Owen or the Transcendentalists. It may be a prescription for the phasing out of TNCs by a transition to more participatory, less uniquely production oriented, less uniform, more socialist societies but hardly in the immediate future except in a handful of special contexts.

To those who would say that such an approach denies the brotherhood of man by denying love to TNC leaders' two answers are relevant. First, to love men does not require loving everything they do - quite the contrary. Second, neither the prophets, the Christ, the fathers nor the great churchmen have ever perceived love as obviating the need within history for criticism and struggle.

To those who would argue that the approach betrays the prophetic

tradition and accepts evil two rather different answers may be relevant. First, human institutions are radically imperfect and will remain so even if informed and constrained by deeper individual commitment to others and to God. In that context tension, context and counter-balance, not an all embracing, perfect, unconstrained power focus appear more likely to reduce oppression, exclusion and exploitation. Second, TNCs do have real capacities to produce and to generate surplus which can at present neither be blandly denied nor speedily replaced. They also have entrenched power, both in their own right and from their beneficiaries. An instant global (or British) crusade to end TNCs would not merely be imprudent and impracticable but dubiously well attuned to the needs of those it sought to serve. The prophets, the Christ, the fathers and the great churchmen rarely, if ever, denied the need for human institutions or advocated mysticism, extreme asceticism and "holy idiocy" as universal and immediate solutions for all individuals and societies.

### III.

#### Toward Coherent, Diversified Relevant Action

The reflection that change in TNC actions is likely to be significant only in changed contexts and only through a process of struggle involving dialogue and confrontation does not answer the questions - where, how, when. Existing Christian (and secular) action groups have very diverse approaches. Some concentrate on Third World issues, some on the most egregious abuses, others on the most topical issues, still others apparently do seek to "convert" TNC executives and, through them, their institutions. That each of these approaches may be valid in particular cases, for particular groups or particular times does not invalidate the criticism that there is an uncoordinated, episodic disunity in action and a failure to face TNCs as a system as opposed to as a series of isolated events and units.

A monolithic TNC Programme of the BCC or Christians or all concerned individuals is not practicable (nor for that matter desirable). A greater degree of coherence of thought and of aims and of coordination of information and action would seem to be critical. Six points may help provide a framework toward coherence and coordination.



1. TNCs as a group constitute a system of power and of dominance (or domination). Many of the individuals and groups they face are characterised by weakness and dependence. This is not a matter of conspiracy, it is a fact for concern - the powerful especially those with narrow interests are likely to oppress, to exploit, to exclude, to be unaware of the very existence of the weak and dependent.

TNCs are both nationally and transnationally present and so is the system. There are peripheries in the centre, eg. dockland in London, many Welsh Valleys, much of the Highlands, a good deal of Ulster and centres in the periphery eg. much of Singapore, the core thirty blocks of Nairobi, the Rand triangle (excluding its "black spots"). TNC beneficiaries, victims and "bverlooked" are also transnational even if most of the beneficiaries are in the central industrial economies and those dramatically negatively affected or blatantly exploited or oppressed are most evident in the peripheral economies of the Third World.

2. Power systems must be faced with power. Moral conviction is power. Whether it is best used directly or via mobilizing political or economic power is quite a different issue. In the case of TNCs the latter route appears more plausible. Laws forbidding certain actions and making others unprofitable and political economic contexts in which actions more consistent with movement toward a just, participatory and sustainable society are the most profitable available to TNCs can be effective. A moral basis for demanding and for informing change is critical to raising the levels of consciousness of and mobilizing those who can cause such altered laws and contexts to come into being. Dialogue with TNCs will normally be effective only if such altered consciousness and such mobilization is seen to be proceeding and, if it is, dialogue will result in altered TNC actions even if TNCs decision takers do not alter their own institutional goals and beliefs. If the altered contexts do not, in fact, greatly hamper (or even promote) TNC production and profit they will probably come to endorse them after the event eg. minimum wages, trade unions, state concern with unemployment. That, however, is the result not the cause of their changed actions.

3. A power system can be confronted both at its centre and on its peri-

peripheries. As noted earlier both centre and peripheries exist in the United Kingdom and in many Third World states even if globally speaking the UK is part of the centre.

Action at the domestic periphery - among the unemployed, in depressed areas, among minority workers and would be workers (including youth and women) - is critical. That is where the oppressed, excluded and exploited are and that is where they can mobilize on immediate issues and build their own consciousness to inform national efforts.

Action on the external periphery - in solidarity with its oppressed, exploited and under their leadership - is also critical. In the first place their plight is absolutely worse than that of most on the domestic periphery. Further, as a unit the UK is a net beneficiary of the TNC system and to achieve greater equity and participation at home by increased or continued dominance abroad is hardly a Christian road to distributive justice. Finally if TNCs are confronted in some states only, they will shift the balance of their global activity toward others with losses to the domestic and few (or negative) gains for the Third World periphery.

Action at the external centres (as in the EEC attempt to impose altered production relations and levels of wages in South Africa via European based TNCs) is also relevant, like that at the external periphery it should be in solidarity with and under the leadership of Third World advocates of, and mobilizers for, change. To create a British centered and run crusade to alter the practices of British companies abroad for the benefit of foreign workers, peasants and unemployed is in a sense quite as neo-colonial as the TNC system. The cure is not to halt concern at the shoreline but to reach out to, be informed by and work under the guidance of those most directly affected. It also means to concentrate British efforts on the British units which can control or influence the peripheral centres. British action in respect of the London headquarters of global tea companies is an area in which Sri Lanka and India advocates of change need and want solidarity in very concrete ways; organising estate workers, influencing their own governments or confronting subsidiary managers are areas in which they usually have both more relevant knowledge and more effective cadres than their British sympathizers.

Finally, action is needed at the domestic centres both as they affect overseas actions and at least equally as they affect the United Kingdom. (In this context the UK branches of such companies as IBM and Ford are part of the domestic centre and the need for solidarity includes seeking support for coordinated confrontation of their global headquarters by individuals and groups in their home countries).

4. These approaches are not exclusive. Many tongues but one voice and many gifts but one service are as relevant to this context as to the one in which Saint Paul addressed them. (His evident suppressed irritation with many who spoke in rather private and unintelligible tongues and appeared loath to divulge their wisdom may also be opposite.) However, they need to be seen as interrelated and each needs to be informed by an understanding of the whole.

To operate only at the peripheral level runs a grave risk - especially among Christian groups who have a tendency to be well intentioned, less well informed outsiders concerned with but not of the actual excluded, exploited or oppressed - of dealing with symptoms and binding up the wounded to go back into the system which injured them (and gave their would be helpers their advantages). That often results in the "blame the victim" attitude - "they" cannot adapt, "they" do not understand the system and cannot work it (as opposed to understand it at one level only too well and wellknow "they" neither can nor want to "work it"). While greater periphery leadership and greater humility by those in solidarity with them can avert this pathology of concern, they cannot make a purely periphery centered confrontation adequate. Power systems need to be confronted at the centre as well.

A similar risk exists in external centred approaches. This is not to criticise groups focusing on Sri Lankan tea or Southern Africa or the fuelling of Mr. Smith - they are necessary. However, taken alone such activity can have three unsound results. The first is the international variant of the "blame the victim" approach. The second is a somewhat Pharisaic self righteousness which overlooks the extent to which the United Kingdom - including the critics - benefit from the TNC system. The third is an even greater diversion of attention from the relation of the TNC system to domestic British

problems, challenges and inequities. Concern with and attention to TNCs at home is not simply a counterpart of, but necessary for, effective understanding of action in respect to their activities abroad.

Nor is a centre only approach desirable. In practice it comes to be a rather too polite dialogue of rather too similar power brokers more than rather removed from the realities of the men and women on the periphery. (Few of us at this BCC consultation are really oppressed, excluded and exploited. Most of us are beneficiaries - direct or indirect, willing or unhappy - of the TNC system.) Immediacy, transparency, mobilisation and responsibility require direct ties with and humility toward the peripheries and the excluded, exploited and oppressed men and women on them. One does not change the world primarily by boardroom bargains or technical tricks and the whole burden of the Old and the New Testament would appear to caution us against primary reliance <sup>on</sup> any such approach on moral as well as practical grounds.

5. For concern with TNCs to be seen as of central importance to large numbers of individuals and groups the domestic, North-North and North-South aspects of TNCs must be viewed as a whole. All are of concern to the UK. In each case the present perspectives are inadequate.

For example, in the case of drugs there is a moderately clear perception that Hoffman La Roche overcharged its United Kingdom Customers and that it sought to avoid disclosure of the nature of its intracompany transactions. There is some perception that UK (and other) drug producers engage in not dissimilar pricing practices in the Third World but perhaps less that UK exporters have secured British government support to forbid them to disclose data (parallel to what the UK government sought from Hoffman La Roche) to investigatory bodies of foreign states (eg. the USA). There is some disquiet at promotion costs and practices but little consideration of its real relationship to pharmaceutical TNCs or to health and only episodic awareness of the far more serious (and less governmentally or contextually constrained) effects of such promotion in the Third World (eg. the only too frequent linkages - however unintentional - between babyhood promotion and infant malnutrition and death).

There is concern when TNC decisions threaten jobs or communities in the UK. How often is this seen in relation to their actions abroad? There are calls for planning agreements for domestic and foreign TNCs here - the reaction to similar demands abroad can hardly be said to be one of supportative solidarity.

6. For criticism to lead to assent to change, the "viability" of reformed or transformed patterns must be demonstrated. At the least it must be shown that curbing TNCs abroad and altering the context in which they operate domestically will not be economically disastrous and in particular that high costs of change will not be borne by individuals and communities of below-average income, alternatives and adaptability.

Again this is not to deny the importance of principled action. It is to say that principles mobilize more effectively when they are not perceived as diametrically opposed to self interest. Further that the costs of change should not be borne by the weak and poor is a perfectly principled position even if the costs of the status quo are borne by other weak and poor individuals and communities.

This point interlocks with the preceding one. British people are affected by their own and by foreign TNCs in many of the same ways as individuals in other central and in peripheral economies. They have a potential common self interest in solidarity eg. in respect to international disclosure of drug pricing and coordinated national codes on drug promotion applying to all firms operating within each state and to nationally based firms wherever they operate. Further it relates back to the issue of contexts. Any job - no matter how exploitative or ill paid or depressing - is likely to be defended if change is perceived as meaning no work. Thus the "runaway shop" opposition to Third World industrialization (whether TNC dominated or not) but thus also the potential support for coordinated transnational action on wages and on transformation assistance to those initially affected wherever they are located.

#### IV.

#### Notes On Areas And Roles

This outline of strategy and broad tactics still leaves two questions unanswered. What are some major areas for coordinated action? What

roles do churches and other Christian groups have?

1. Altering contexts implies codes. However, at present it does not seem that international Codes of Conduct are a fruitful way ahead. The OECD draft looks rather more like a TNC's Charter than anything else - granted it would perhaps curb some egregious abuses, hamper newcomer TNCs to the advantage of old and simplify data collection for some tax authorities. In practice they would legitimize TNCs and thwart national action rather more than control TNCs and legitimize their control. Further, in the absence of a world government, enforcement would pose severe problems.

National codes are more promising, as a starting point. They can be adjudicated on by national courts. Assuming some coordination - involving countries with moderately similar codes even if these are a minority - national court decisions in one state can be honoured in other states (at least some other states). Further national codes - like that of Sweden - can lay down standards of conduct on nationally based TNCs for their (and their subsidiaries') operations abroad.

2. However, codes alone will be inadequate. The history of control bodies is all too often one of cooption and conversion into spokesmen for those they were meant to control. Limiting that risk requires broad knowledge of TNC activities in enough detail for individuals to see how it affects them, for analysts to work through its overall impact, for decision takers (at all levels) to see how to influence it. Disclosure levels in the UK are minimal (even compared with the USA), in a form ill designed for the non-specialist, aggregated in ways limiting workplace and community consciousness raising and mobilization.

From the TNC point of view there are good reasons to oppose disclosure - they are the most apt students of the dictum that knowledge is power (and profit) - but these rarely relate to the standard "commercial necessity" argument in respect to more than a minute fraction of the data kept private. From the concerned Christian point of view, there is every reason to press for maximum disclosures and to give high priority both to analysis of that data and to translation into forms readily intelligible to lay (in economic and business terminology) men and women.

3. Mobilization, consciousness and effective struggle both must seek to enhance and be built on participation. TNCs (like other large, centralized, hierarchical units including inter alia most government bureaucracies, especially those designed to assist the weak and poor, many trade unions, the Labour Party, a number of churches) are not prone to accepting or encouraging participation except in rather narrow functional contexts in which some now perceive it as conducive to productivity and profitability either directly or by avoiding damaging industrial or more general political conflicts.

The traditional trade union approach to participation is not irrelevant but it is - and is increasingly perceived by many trade union members and leaders - as too narrow for 1977. Workers need broader participation than confrontation or dialogue about remuneration and involvement in settling secondary aspects of working conditions. Worker directors may or may not be part of the answer - taken alone they are in danger of being isolated (within the board and by being on the board) and/or coopted. In any event communities (whose health is integrally affected by firm actions), consumers and employees of related but separate firms (eg. the automobile components and automobile manufacturing firm cross impact) all need information and power to participate in decisions critically affecting them and can hardly all seek it primarily either via traditional trade union wage negotiations and grievance procedures or by being represented on elephantine boards. What can be done probably varies widely from case to case, a good deal more grass roots action and experience is needed before national generalizations in any but the most partial terms will either be appropriate or be based on a body of support adequate to achieve their implementation.

4. These comments on participation also apply to the Churches. Too often Christian concern on socio or political economic issues is comprised by a quite limited number of lay and clerical activists, a few theologians and scholars and another handful of ecclesiastical power brokers and dignitaries (lay and clerical). The vast majority of believing Christians and the clergy ministering to them are not involved and, if anything, wonder why such a limited number of people are loudly proclaiming that the issue is of great concern to all Christians. (Any likeness to the present state of Christian concern in respect to TNCs is wholly deliberate.)

Activists, theologians, analysts and secular affairs and church leaders are all critical components but they do not comprise an adequate whole. This is especially true because these clusters often interact both warily and in rather limited ways suggesting either a certain lack of mutual love and charity or a mutual lack of comprehensibility.

The first step is to achieve better communication and coordination based on a common Christian understanding of at least a number of issues at stake and a continuing dialogue on the others. That, however, is only a first step. It should lead to a common commitment to reach out to inform, enter into dialogue and discussion with, raise the consciousness and concern of the majority of Christians who simply do not perceive TNCs and Christianity as having any serious intellectual relationship, moral conflict or implications for action. Christianity is based on community and communion - Christian action should in large part arise from congregations and their discussions and concerns. In respect of TNCs - at least in Britain - that is simply not the case today. It is all very well to sing "Like a mighty army, moves the Church of God" but it might be prudent and Christian on this and on other issues to attempt to make the reality a somewhat less radically imperfect representation of the ideal.

5. To say that the Christian duty in respect of TNCs is primarily a prophetic one related to the struggle for justice in history requires diversity as well as unity. It also requires the realization that on any particular point we may be incomplete, out of date or wrong. (True the surviving prophetic works may not seem to support this point. The works of prophets who - no matter how convinced and sincerely believing themselves to be interpreting the Lord's will - were anachronistic or plain wrong, presumably have vanished leaving us with a less than random sample.) Faced with lack of interest a prophetic role requires securing attention. Faced with vehement opposition or entrenched unconcern it requires warning of the cost to others and ourselves of present systems. In less indifferent or hostile climates, however, prophecy must venture into the harder and riskier (in the sense of danger of error and especially error acted on by others) of outlining directions and parameters of change which would be valid in turns of Christian



theology and belief. The last role may seem to run the risk of venturing into theocracy but it might be remarked that the prophets seem on the whole to have avoided that danger and that, in any event, it hardly seems a very real and immediate danger for churches today.

V.

Envoi

These reflections have not dealt with specific abuses committed by TNCs as a central theme. Equally they have not tackled the question of whether TNCs (or more generally, large scale private or state capitalism and bureaucratic socialism) are not in themselves abuses from a Christian perspective. These are important topics - why are they largely absent?

1. To concentrate at a general level (as opposed to in specific campaigns) on specific, outrageous instances of abuse distracts attention from broader systemic aspects. ITT in Chile or RTZ in Namibia do constitute abuses so gross and so major as to deserve detailed attention. However, they are extreme manifestations of the more general systemic tendencies of holders of large scale economic power to seek to influence political contexts in their own interest and to make alliances with whoever can guarantee them profit for an adequate (sometimes quite short) period. These tendencies are always dangerous. In different contexts they can, if understood, be used beneficially. If the alternative to a radical state determined to create and phase out joint ventures is chaos and the joint ventures do offer a profit over their life, the same "principles" that led to ITT Chile and Rössing can lead to limited, negotiated co-operation for specific, limited purposes.
2. TNCs are hard to reconcile with Christian theology. Adam Smith's moral case for competitive, small scale capitalism (which was a faute de mieux, not a positive, one) is simply not applicable to massive holders of power. Indeed, Smith's view of the lineal predecessors of TNCs were hardly radically different from, or more complimentary to them than, much of the WCC Consultations' analysis of and strictures on their modern grandchildren. However, TNCs in the area of production at least do have something to offer, especially in the UK, and most certainly cannot be expected to disappear in the

next few decades. Therefore, it is essential to understand them and the ways in which they can be influenced to have any major short term impact.

3. There is no broad agreement among British Christians on "after TNCs what" (or indeed on the implication of that question that TNCs should join the Chartered Companies and Merchant Adventurers as rather specialized historic topics). Clearly state TNCs (capitalist eg. Italy's ENI, the UK's British Airways, or socialist eg. Soviet and Yugoslav trading corporations) have many similarities (positive and negative) with "private" TNCs. Equally clearly no system excluding large economic units with substantial power and a substantial degree of centralization and hierarchy is on offer. Therefore, modelling a post TNC world is simply not usually a fruitful route toward principled mobilization to confront TNCs today, least of all among British Christians.
  
4. It is quite possible to argue that the evolution of agreed (and quite possibly diverse) alternatives to, and transformations of, TNCs can only be achieved in the process of confrontation to achieve more limited changes in their actions and the contexts in which they operate. Certainly it is valid to argue that the nature of post TNC economic organization will depend primarily on socio-political and socio-economic decisions which cannot be dealt with as sub-topics of the present interaction of Christians and TNCs in the 1977 British context.

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