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**NAGYPÁL Szabolcs**

# Citizens in the Reign of God

*For this issue of Student World (Christians, Empire and Basileia – Chrétiens, Empire et Basileia – Cristianos, Imperio y Basilea), we called for articles, among other topics, on the imperial powers and their military hegemony and economic domination: for example colonisation or totalitarianism.*

*Also, we solicited contributions on the effect of empires (imperia) on religions, theology, culture and higher education; trade justice, women and indigenous people; and case studies of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on related issues.*

*At the same time, we invited reflections on alternatives to empire, and the globalisation of justice and peace; on international solidarity action plans concerning empire; and on power and empire from a Biblical and theological perspective.*

*Finally, we encouraged essays on the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Early Church against domination; on Christian resistance to empires (including students and SCMs); and on the realisation of God's Basileia, where justice and peace reign for all.*

*Reflecting on all these, our 2006/1 issue of Student World is divided into five chapters. These are: Spirituality of the Cross, Empire and Humanity, Foretaste of Ecumenism, Engagement and Discipleship, and Prayer and Eucharist.*

## Charisma and Treasures

Indeed, the ecumenical movement is particularly responsible for making these topics real challenges to her constituency, as she strives to fulfil her aim of using student ministry to realise God's Basileia, where justpeace would be the norm.

The ecumenical Student Christian Movement (SCM) should truly acknowledge her prophetic role of solidarity, peace and justice in the student ministry, in the Church, and also in the wider world.

Not only sporadic, but also structural or systemic evil (in the political, economic and social strata) should be fought against, likewise in an institutionalised or systemic way. Global economic injustices affect us gravely when, for example, we are considered of a lesser or greater economic value than others in the scheme of power relations.

This situation calls us to bear the brunt of each other's burdens in the rapid pace of economic and cultural globalisation, mostly co-ordinated and orchestrated by profit-minded multinational companies and corporations.

We are all icons of God, so the equality of rights should be a guiding principle – also in the midst of the Church, of course. The charisma and treasures of all of us should be used properly to preach, to minister, to serve, to become ordained or to assume leadership positions in our churches and denominations.

We young people are called to be the backbone of the Church, but also to be Her faithful servants by providing proper leadership and service at all levels. After all, the notion of the Reign of God humbly but powerfully challenges the way roles and relations are articulated in the Church and in society.

## Responsible Care for Creation

The universal concept of human rights is concerned mainly with the rights and claims of each human being, in an anthropocentric way. This notion is an indispensable instrument for the promotion of civil and social rights, but it needs to be balanced by a strong emphasis on responsible care for God's gift of Creation.

Sustaining humanity demands a new awareness of the limits imposed on human existence. Sustainability can only be achieved if the human race is prepared to respect balances in exploiting natural resources.

The AGAPE Document (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and the Earth, 2006), which is a call to love and action, invites us "to reflect on the question of power and empire from a Biblical and theological perspective, and to take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers, because all power is accountable to God."

The witness of the Church and of all of Her members therefore cannot identify uncritically with only a narrow human rights discourse: we are at the same time called to defend the rights of nature.

## Presence of the Authentic God

This year, in 2006, the ecumenical world came together in *Porto Alegre*, Brazil, to celebrate her achievements and to dream the brave dream of the future. So now it is well worth having a look at some important aspects that the phenomenon of Student World (SW) can offer for further consideration.

The Tradition of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) has constantly refreshed and enlarged the meaning of Christian unity and the Reign of God as central thrusts of our commitment and purpose.

She has explored and tested out its meaning in the shape and procedures of her own movement, reflecting the divisions and friendships between the many separate denominations of the one Body of Christ, the Universal Church.

Also, she lives out the promise that the Universal Church can offer, constantly healing our brokenness in the struggles of communities, promising ways to discover and to live out a single humanity.

Our question for all time remains fundamentally the same: how will our encounters create an environment for genuine dialogue and cooperation? In trying to answer this important question, we must portray the joys and challenges of ecumenism, as perceived through our profound and personal encounters in community.

But the search for the true God remains, and the basic criteria to discover the presence of the authentic God are love, truth and righteousness; empathy and compassion with the oppressed can serve as a hermeneutical path for the evaluation of reality.

Indeed, the concrete and dynamic testimony of Christians is the ferment and seed of the future for another community and for a different society. We should centre ourselves in a lively belief in God the Holy Spirit, Who holds open the promise of a different and much better world for all God's creatures.

## Elements of Tradition

Since the year 1908, the ecumenical review *Student World* has been a respected voice and forum for ecumenically-minded students and young intellectuals, creating a network of concerns and ideas. This issue of ours is connected to the WSCF global interregional programme in August 2006 in Nairobi, Kenya, on the same topic.

From among the editors of *Student World*, the most tragic story is that of *Philippe MAURY*, editor between 1950 and 1961, who departed this Earth at a very young age, still as an active general secretary.

The Federation has a *Philippe Maury Memorial Committee* (PhMMC), whose duty is, according to the WSCF By-Laws to the Constitution, “to promote study and action on such themes concerning the relationship between *Christian faith, mission and politics*, as are of relevance to the WSCF.”

One way of this promotion of study and action can be “to hold Philippe Maury Memorial Events”. Since 2003 it has been the *Student World* Editorial Board which *de facto* exercised the duties of this Committee, and the Memorial Events were the publication of the ecumenical review itself.

The Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) was first celebrated on Sunday, 13 February 1898, at the second meeting of what was then known as the General Committee of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

The participants of the Federation’s then ten ecumenical member movements believed that intercessory prayer should be a vital ingredient in the life of a world-wide body of Christian students.

As a result, the early leaders of the Federation called on Christian youth and students around the world to join together in February each year for the observance of the Universal Day of Prayer for Students.

This is the oldest tradition of ecumenical prayer in the whole Christian world. Its regular celebration paved the way for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) now held each year in January.

For more than a century, students and friends of WSCF have observed this Day of Prayer as a way to express their common commitment as witnesses of our faith in God and in each other, to the world both inside and outside our academic communities.

Similarly, an ecumenical review would not be complete without involving and channelling the contribution of arts and design to ecumenical discourse. The re-established *Student World* has always laid great emphasis on treasuring the points the artists and designers have to make for our topics and discussions.

After a European, a North American and a Middle Eastern artist, we have the pleasure of welcoming an illustrator from Asia-Pacific, from Aotearoa – New Zealand, Heather KILGOUR. Her email address is [heather\\_kilgour@yahoo.com](mailto:heather_kilgour@yahoo.com).

## Seduction and Revulsion

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She is Anglican, a member of SCM Aotearoa – New Zealand between 1991 and 1997. She was the women’s co-ordinator in the Otago SCM, attended the opening conference of the Asian Women’s Resource Centre in 1994; and took part in a movement visit in India in 1995. Now she is a senior friend, living in Wellington.

She holds DFA (1990) and MFA (RMIT) (1999) degrees, worked as an exhibiting artist and then as a film sculptor for 3Foot6 and Weta Workshop, cooperating in the movies *Lord of the Rings*, *Narnia* and *King Kong*. Her email address is [heather\\_kilgour@yahoo.com](mailto:heather_kilgour@yahoo.com).

The montages made from glossy magazine images create a sense of revulsion towards excessive wealth and consumerism, by juxtaposing the seductive advertising imagery with texts that spoke of poverty, death and destruction.

Indeed, if we are to survive as a species we must shift from an empire based on capitalism and consumerism, which is fast destroying our environment, to one that respects the rights of all species to live on this Earth.

## **Stand up in Solidarity**

In addition to stimulating discourse amongst young Christian intellectuals on the topic of Empire, WSCF seeks also to make efforts for concrete change for the better as we await God's Reign.

One important effort in this regard is for the eradication of extreme poverty. This year the Federation was part of a world-wide initiative, the so-called Stand-up Challenge. Here is a summary of its aims and credo:

World leaders have promised to accomplish this eradication by achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. We are reminding them of this promise and joining thousands of people in many countries who are doing the same.

Therefore, we stand here proudly as members of the generation that intends to defeat extreme poverty. We cannot stay seated when a child born in a poor country today will die thirty years earlier than a child born in a wealthy one; and when tens of thousands of people die unnecessarily every day.

And we stand up because we are asking not for charity, but justice. We know that in our names and on our behalf, world leaders have made mighty promises to bring this to an end: they are called the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). What is needed is the political will to achieve and exceed these goals; so we are on our feet to say the following.

We say to the leaders of wealthy countries: 'Be great. Fight to keep your promises: debt cancellation, more and better aid, and trade rules that help to fight poverty. You know what needs to be done, so do it.'

We also stand before the leaders of poorer countries to say: 'Be great. Make it your first responsibility to save the lives of your poorest citizens. We ask you to achieve real transparency and accountability in how money is spent, to tackle inequality, to root out corruption. You know what needs to be done, so do it.'

The record we really want to break is the world's record of breaking promises and just ignoring the poor. We do not want record numbers of people dying of poverty every year for the rest of our lives.

We are more than six billion voices, wanting justice now. We want no more excuses: we will not stand for them. Wherever you are, know that your action is critical in reminding world leaders to keep their promise to end extreme poverty by 2015.

We are the very first generation in human history that can really put an end to global hunger and extreme poverty: we must therefore firmly refuse to miss out on this historic opportunity of ours.

## **Prayer for the Eradication of Poverty**

Loving God, as with Paul, you call us to stand up to serve You and to witness the very Good News of the Gospel in our world today, which is increasingly divided by suffering, extreme poverty, injustice and war.

By Your loving and enlightening Holy Spirit, empower us students and young people to cooperate and take action for the eradication of poverty and help us to be witnesses of dialogue and peace.

Guide our political, economic and social leaders to fulfil their promises and to make decisions which take into account the needs of our sisters and brothers around the world, who are most in need of Your justice and love. Amen.

Anthony STRANO

# Spirituality and Politics

*Spirituality and politics: the two usually do not mix well. It is rare that a person who has position uses that authority to serve the needs of others; usually such needs are exploited, because personal ambition is prioritised over responsibility, goodwill and benevolence.*

*When we look at history we can see this, whether it be emperor, empress, president or pope. Of course there have been benevolent authorities, and their characteristic was that they always avoided the use of violence.*

*Any kingdom that justifies the use of offensive violence cannot be spiritual, if we accept that “spiritual” means peaceful, respectful and harmonious. Although one often hears “justified violence,” what are the standards on which this is based?*

*For example, is it justified to stone someone to death for a sexual offence? Concerning the current events in the Middle East: what is justified, what is not? Can the use of violence really bring justice?*

*Although certainly there are basic standards, very often the word “justice” camouflages revenge, the arrogance of being right, the feelings of hate and anger. A deep level of unbiased understanding and clear, unemotional discernment and wisdom are necessary whilst deciding which actions have to be taken in situations of conflict and disagreement.*

## For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power

In the past and in the present empires, institutions and leaders too quickly jump to conclusions, label others as enemies under the banner of freedom or truth and, most unfortunately, the supposed will of God.

A few thousand years ago King ASHOKA vigorously used armed violence to extend his Indian kingdom; the use of such violence was very common and regarded as a normal method for conquest by any king or emperor or power.

It is written that after the last great battle he fought, he saw thousands of bodies of dead soldiers; at that point in his life he was filled with great remorse and regret, realising he had been responsible for so much suffering and death. He decided never to wage war again. He became a Buddhist and spread the ideas of *ahimsa*, non-violence, as far as he could.

Of course such realizations and subsequent changes were exceptionally rare among rulers. On one hand one half expects selfish desires and malevolent policies in political systems, but it is a great shock when godly people or institutions indulge in the violent pursuit of power, glory, material possessiveness and even revenge.



There are many, many examples of such leaders and of such people both in the past and in the present but, of course there are examples of people who kept and still keep the integrity of their spiritual beliefs and position.

Good examples for this are the emperor John the Good and his wife Irene of the Byzantine era, Pope John XXIII, Mahatma GANDHI, Saint Francis of Assisi, or Martin LUTHER, just to name a few.

You cannot use destructive force and call it justice; you cannot kill and call it God's will; you cannot subject others and call it the divine right of kings; and you cannot gain freedom, equality, sisterhood and brotherhood through violent revolutions.

At least it cannot be for someone who calls herself or himself a spiritual person, for when their conscience compels them to act, to speak against something wrong, they are aware that a way can be found which does not involve the use of any violence.

Although they do resist, finally they have the courage either personally or collectively to act in a way that does not compromise or damage their firmly held and profound spiritual values and principles.

## Honoured be Your Name

When systems have been corrupted by political and personal ambitions, there are always individuals who rise above such limitations, keeping the high respect and honour of their personal life.

In fact, they are the true emperors. In the Greek language the word 'emperor,' *aftokratoras*, means the person who is the ruler of her or his own self and it all begins there, with the person, the individual.

Although we may look at social, economic, cultural, historical and regional factors, which in their own way are relevant, what makes the real difference for betterment is first of all the individual.

It is the individual, who because of her or his experience and code of beliefs, has been able to rise above the commonly heard thinking and customs and preserved the integrity of the true and authentic.

They have been able to "see" and to resist wrong values and negative forces. One can see this many times in history, for example how the young students Sophia SCHOLL and her brother Hans SCHOLL actively opposed the Nazi regime, constantly appealing to inherent human spiritual values.

They had the courage to stand and to speak, and although they paid for it with their lives, their example, although at first reviled by the German people, is now honoured and highly appreciated. In fact, in a country where there are many war criminals, they are among the few war heroes.

## As we Forgive those who Trespass against us

We resist by the way we live, that is, by the spiritual standard which we believe in and which we follow on a daily basis. This standard does not change at all because of fear or expediency.

Resistance is not essentially accusations, threats and taking up of arms. True resistance is to live the message of peace, of respectfulness and of forgiveness. Let us ask: How did Jesus Christ resist? Or how did Buddha resist?

A true value is a true value always, whether it is peace or forgiveness or respect or tolerance or mercy. Although these values have a social expression, essentially they are the inner values of the human spirit, therefore they are eternal.

They can not be diluted by clever arguments or any type of expediency, because they are not values of convenience or of a particular epoch or social structure. They are existentially always relevant, and their relevance is expressed by any individual who chooses to tap into them at any time and at any place on the planet.

The worth of human life depends on the practice and the expression of these inherent values. The experience and expression of these values is centred on realizing the personal, inner system of these eternal principles.

But we must also connect them with each other, and we must connect them with God, the Original Pure Source. This becomes the way to truly overcome and resist whatever hypocrisy, evil and injustice that exist.

We can always find reasons to complain about and blame any and every external system, whether religious, political or social; and thereby conveniently excuse our inertia, frustration and negativity.

All external systems and institutions are human-made, so it is largely inevitable, even with the best and most honest intentions, that they will be faulty and mistaken to a lesser or to a much greater degree.

Problems abound everywhere and have done so for all time, whatever period of history we look at. Often the problem itself, however, is not the problem, but the way we think about it and the way we approach it is the real problem.

An innovator never focuses on the problem, but rather makes room consciously for alternatives and solutions. It is one and for that a quite important thing to acknowledge a difficulty, a fault and a wrong behaviour.

But it is quite another thing to focus on it so much that it expands in our mind and entangles us in negativity. The entanglement stifles clear understanding and being so overfocused on what is wrong, we become completely blind to the obvious.

But what is indeed the obvious? The obvious is the reality of our personal, inner system. Until we recognize, until we use the resources of our inner system, life will not offer positive responses or alternatives to the harsh negativities which abound in every system of present life.

## **On Earth as it is in Heaven**

The individuals who realize the existence of their inner systems, who daily tap into that energy of permanent principles, rise above the pettiness and trivia of complaint and comparison; they can rise above the harshness of injustice and cruelty and can finally decide to Act.

They will act by such an action that is not permeated with revenge, with self-righteousness or with resignation, but by an action that answers and responds to the challenges for benevolent alternatives.

Such individuals attract similar individuals, who also have decided to think and act from their inner system. They come together, like the fingers of a hand, to accomplish a genuine and profound task.

Together they constitute a powerful and effective hand, which is not clenched to punch, to push, or to beat, but as a hand, which is entitled and willing to hold, to touch, to heal, to encourage and to care.

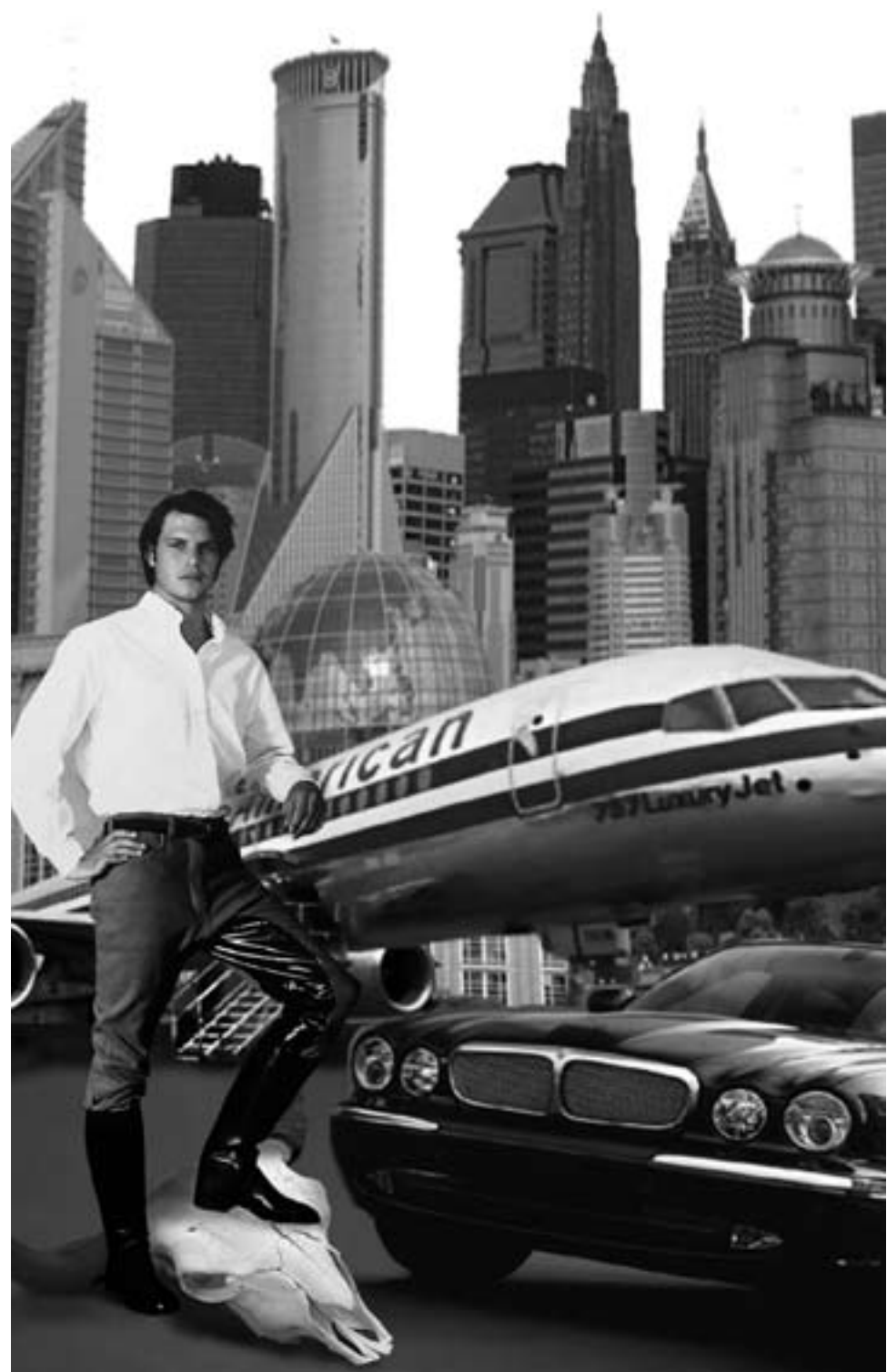
Those who use the inner eternal principles as reference points do not descend into the bitterness and violence of the accusers, the judges, the punishers, but they finally decide to help and serve.

Such individuals are able, no matter what threatens them or happens in the world, to maintain the connection with those principles, methods and values that make life holy, sacred, blessed and meaningful.

They work with a great enthusiasm and in a deep silence, because they believe in others as well as believing in life, and so have committed themselves to live non-violently in a violent world.

They can radiate optimism, calmness and peace into the darkest corners of the deepest negativity, working with time and patience, or even quickness and speed, where it appears necessary.

They can continue the fulfilment of their aims and tasks; they can keep going in the pilgrimage of life, because their inner strength gives them a confident and united thought: "There is always a way."



Jamie MORAN

# The Cross is in the World

## Black Pain

An elder in Eastern Christian tradition says you cannot pray for people unless you hurt for them.

“Prayer, which is not from the heart, but is made only by the mind, does not go any farther. To pray with the heart, we must hurt. Just as when we hit our hand or some other part of our body our *nous* is gathered to the point where we are hurting, so also for the *nous* to gather in the heart, the heart must hurt. We should make the other's pain our own. We must love the other, must hurt for him, so that we can pray for him. We must come out, little by little, from our own self and begin to love, to hurt for other people.”

This is clear-cut: to love people, we must make their pain our own. It is not just that we should ‘feel’ their hurt, empathically, because that could come and go; what is stated here is stronger than that. To love people is to hurt for them, because it is to join them where they hurt.

The hurt in all people is deep, nothing can assuage it. The heart is troubled, and the heart is broken, at depth. There is a hole in the heart that cannot be filled. In the heart's depth, there is an abyss filled with what Federico García LORCA called ‘black pain’.

In some individual persons, and in some whole peoples, this pain is extreme. Their lives have revealed to them the deep pain in everyone else, the pain paved over, blanked out, stifled, strangled. In some manner, these persons or these peoples carry the pain for others, because in others the pain is disavowed.

I have my own hurt, like everyone else, but I also carry a fathomless pain that strikes me at times strangely, and digs in so deep, I know I will die of it. I finally realised why this relentless pain is in me. It is not what my mother did to me. It is not what my father did to me. It is not about what happened to me. It is about what happened to them. It is my love for the Red Indian peoples that has brought me to another pain, a pain bottomless, inexplicable, terrible. At times, this pain of the other whom I love screams. At other times it is mute. It is always inarticulate. It does not know what to say. There are no words. Its terrible question cannot be voiced. I will voice it.

Did I count for so little that you stood back and let me be thrown away?

The Red Indian peoples suffered the greatest genocide in the history of the world. It took longer than the Jewish Shoa, and it was far bigger and far more comprehensive. It took three centuries to kill off one hundred fifty million people in the Americas. Imagine all those souls, children, grandmothers and grandfathers, women and men in

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Jamie MORAN was born in the United States of America, of Red Indian and Celtic descent, but he married and now works in England. At the age of twenty-two, he converted from Tibetan Buddhism to Russian Orthodox Christianity; he works as a therapist and senior lecturer on counselling and psychology at a university in London. He is writing a novel on the conflict between settlers and indigenous peoples in the American West of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, and he is a sub-chief in the Cante Tinze (Strong Hearts) Warrior Society of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux) at Pine Ridge, South Dakota. His email address is [J.Moran@rochampton.ac.uk](mailto:J.Moran@rochampton.ac.uk).

the torrent of life, all suddenly ripped out, cut off, thrown away. Can you imagine all those souls, as they were uprooted and thrown on the rubbish dump, crying in protest, crying in incomprehension? A whole people. A whole way of living. A good way of living, an ancient way of living, a spiritual way of living immersed in the strangeness and beauty of the Earth. The genocide was physical and the genocide was cultural. Every trace of these people, every trace of their way of life, must be extinguished. Greed is better, Anglo-Saxon capitalism is better, to live by reason abstracted from the body is better, to have no soul and to have no heart is better. Progress is better. Mammon is better. Mammon is the god in whom we trust.

In the pain in my heart there is grief and anger without any bottom, without any relief. I know this pain. It is inarticulate but it tells me things. I know the disappearance of these peoples of the sacred beginning, these peoples of the dream time who came forth from the caves in the Earth, is a cataclysm beyond imagining, for all of humanity, as well as for them. This cataclysm is so vast it cannot be measured. It is on a scale off any scale. It is as monumental, and as horrendous, as if we were to lose a third of the Earth and had to go on with what remained. This cannot be allowed to happen. If it happens, it will affect us all, as well as them. It will affect the very Earth. Maka already mourns her lost children in America; she is not friendly to the interlopers, which is why they build their machines and defences all over Maka's body: they fear her. None of the spirits of the land welcomes the newcomers. They sing in the night, and in the loneliest winds in the day. Their no words songs say, every tread on this ground is on graves, you tread on the dead, you tread on souls. Jesus Christ may have died for you. He described you accurately when he said to the unknown God, they do not know what they do. You still do not know what you are doing. Is it an excuse? Or is it your innocence, the unparalleled naïveté that shelters your rabid selfishness and ravening covetousness that is most horrendous of all your evils?

Yes, you, Christians, I am talking to you.

Jesus Christ died for you too, but whom have you ever died for? You call yourselves Christians, but that claim stinks in my nostrils. It sickens me with its hypocrisy. When are you going to die for anyone? You did not die for the people of the beginning, the people of the garden. You made them die for you. Your advantage was your sister's and brother's disadvantage; you bought your gain at the cost of her and his loss. Do not talk to me about your Christianity. I spit on it.

Yes, you, Christians, I am talking to you, keeper of the best for yourself, even when it costs the worst for your sister and brother.

You do not know what you are doing, but to get out of your heart's deep pain, you are ready, willing, and perfectly happy, to push your sister and brother deeper into her and his hearts' deep pain. You have endless rationalisations; hypocrisy is something you are good at.

## Dark Place

The black pain inside us, deep in the heart, is connected with something outside us, deep in the world. The heart hurts in each of us, because the world that is the 'common destiny' for all of us is almost lost. There is a deadness and hell and void in the depth

of every heart, but this is not an isolated and personal problem; it exists because that deadness, hell and void is in the depth of the world, and is increasing its hold upon the world.

This is why Jesus Christ's Cross is placed in the world. For the world is where the heart acts or funks acting, where the heart gives or withholds, where the heart brings Heaven to Earth through the abyss, or condemns the world to hell. The heart is staked to the world. The heart is make or break for the world, but even more importantly, the world is make or break for the heart. The world is the heart's fate. This fate is a burden, this fate is a wound, because it opens out the heart and binds it to the fate of the world. If the world is lost, the heart goes down with it. This fate is terrible, because it brings the heart to the place that is terrible in the world.

The Cross is that place in the world which is called in Latin *terribilis est locus iste*: 'this place is terrible.' This is the place of the existential edge and the existential gap and the existential crossing of the roads. Black Elk said of this place that it is where the good red road of spiritual growth and understanding is crossed by the bad black road of worldly difficulties and war; he said as well, it is the Great Mystery who has made these roads to Cross, and where they Cross is holy. A friend once said it is here the road of Heaven and the road of the world Cross, and we must choose; but this is not right, because it is at this intersection that we can go no farther, for it is in this place Heaven is staked to the ground of the Earth, here Heaven is vowed to suffer for the world, and this is make or break for whether the world will be saved from the abyss beneath its feet; or, should this fail, whether the world will fall all the way into the abyss of ruin and end in dereliction.

Another friend said to me, 'I am called to a dark place.' We all are. We all are, because that is where the Cross is. We are called to the world's most terrible place, because only in that place is the Cross. Only the Cross can redeem the world, but to do that, it must join the world's pain and embrace the worst place in the world. This place is lonely. It is ugly. It is windswept by a hollow wind. I have repeatedly called it 'heart ground': the heart ground is the killing ground. It is the place where it is all lost. Only in the place where it is all really lost, and we are all in the black inexplicable pain that knows that loss, can it all be regained.

The Cross is in the worst place in the world. But this terrible place is also great. This is the deep where God suffers the pain in the human heart that is the pain about the world; this is the deep where God toils in the abysmal; and this is the hour. Cometh the hour, cometh the man. This is the time of decision, the place of leverage. Here we encounter the paradox of the heart's truest passion at its most profound: here we come to defeat and here it turns around. Here we can do nothing and here we can do the only thing that matters.

Where else could the Cross be, except in the most terrible place of the world? Where else is God, except in the place where it goes over the edge, is stuck in the gap, and crucified at the crossing of roads?

Is God in the Church? Only temporarily, only episodically, only now and then. Like us, God turns up and goes away again. God's permanent residence is in the world. The place from which God does not flinch is in the world, at its terrible place, which is also its great place, the place of the turning.

The place where it is all over, and the place where, suddenly, it is all to play for.

## **Deep Hell**

The Cross is not fully embraced in the ascetic desert, where the lesser heart is burnt out of us, to restore the greater heart.

The Cross is not fully embraced in the sacred temple, where the people gather round to enter into sacramental communion with it, by drinking its cup of blood.

These are fine, as far as they go, but they do not go far enough.

The Cross is in the world.

You, Christians, who colluded in the biggest genocide and the largest cataclysm in the history of the Earth, if you want to stop dishonouring your Master, then go where he went, and do what he did.

Stop thinking the Church is 'prior' to the world: if your heart is repaired, then you will give it to the world. That is no good. You have it reversed. Jesus Christ died on the Cross, for the world, then descended into the deep heart of death and Hell of each of us.

When our heart is given to the deep Hell in the world outside us, then God will be given to the deep hell in the heart inside us.

Even you, Christians, will not escape the common destiny. One day you must make peace with it, because until you do, it remains at war with you.

Hetchetu yelo.

Sören ASMUS

# Modernity and the Other

*In the realm of theology in Western Europe, the problems we face today—and especially the ways in which we face these problems—have developed in the period since the XV<sup>th</sup> century. Although we might still use older terms or concepts or might refer to previous sources, our approach remains modern. Even anti-modern attitudes arise in opposition to modern thinking and are therefore dependent upon modern discourse remaining hegemonic.*

*This discourse was born at that very moment in which the European powers started to exercise their influence and control over enormous areas of land and foreign peoples. It is the outward-reaching tendency to supersede and to suppress the Other which started with the reconquista in Spain and then was prolonged in the conquista of the Americas.*

*At the same time, within the Western world the ideological Other developed out of the split between Protestants (Reichstag of Augsburg, 1530) and Roman Catholics (Council of Trent, 1545), the competition of equally powerful doctrines (in political terms) within one framework of philosophy.*

*Behind this split lay the development of a new economic power located in the merchant cities and requiring new ways of ideological expression for the changed experience of society and life. Meanwhile the Inquisition and the hunting of women as witches ensured that the internal Other of the patriarchy, women, were kept under control.*

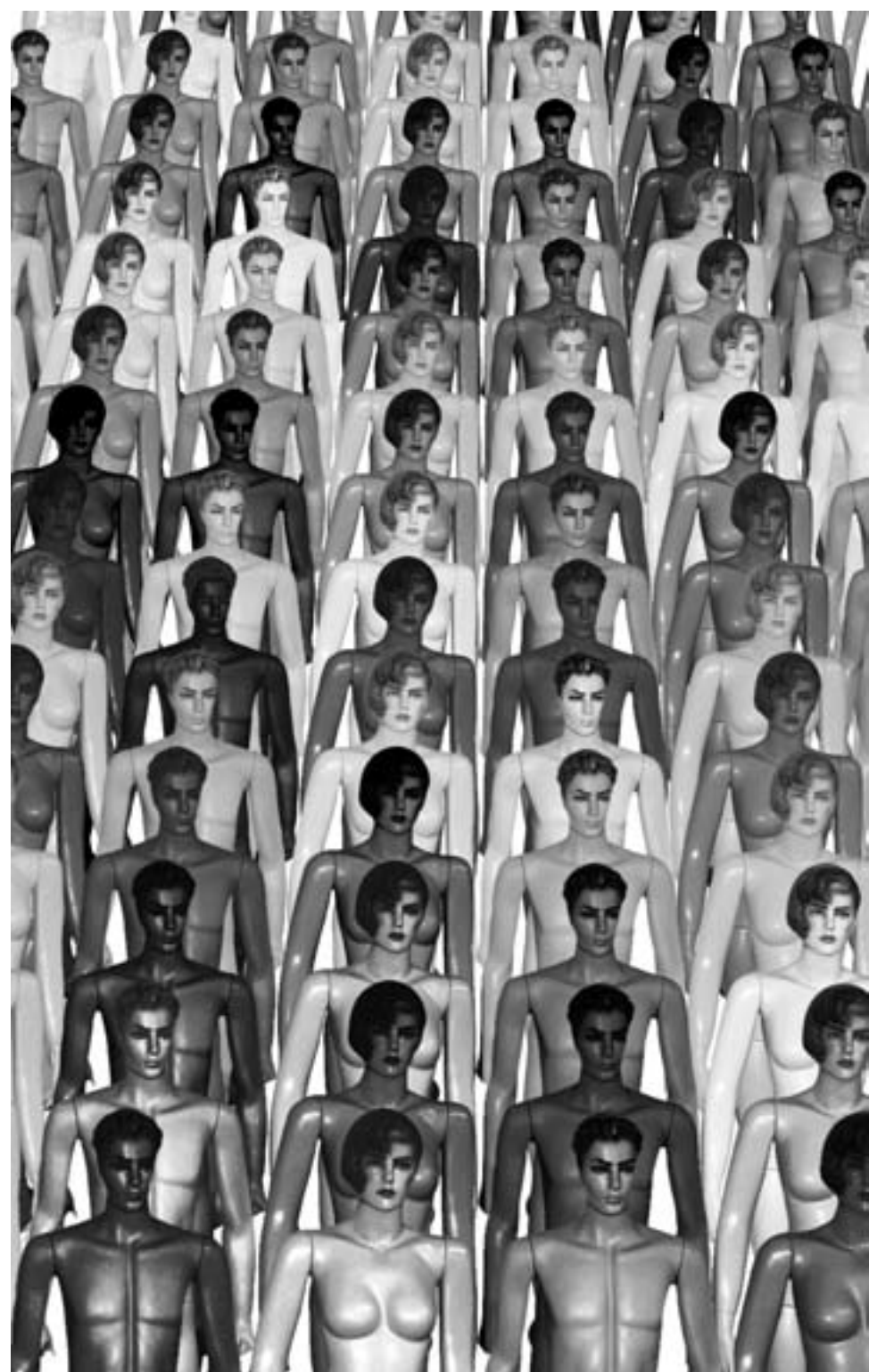
*None of the patterns of superiority, especially in the realm of the ideological superstructure of philosophy and theology, are necessarily new; rather, they have taken root in Western European thought from before the XV<sup>th</sup> century. Still, there must be a new quality added to these older patterns which allows for the development of the gradually achieved global dominance of the Western world.*

*It is the consequence of this new quality and the combination of different patterns that led to the huge number of victims and destruction of livelihoods in this century, at the turn of which we discover the end of the cultural monopoly, both illusory and real. This demise is today termed “post-modern” or “pluralist.”*

## I. At the Beginning

In his article about theology in the project of Modernity, Jürgen MOLTSMANN examines the birth, vitality and congenital defect of the modern age.<sup>1</sup> We will follow his argument here, adding some thoughts relevant to the question of the Other and otherness.

1 MOLTSMANN Jürgen, *Theologie im Projekt der Moderne*. Evangelische Theologie 1995/5. 402–415.



The modern era has two centres of origin: first, the *conquista*, the discovery and conquest of the Americas since 1492; and second, the scientific-technological seizure of power (*Machtergreifung*) of man (sic) over nature.

In both cases it signified the beginning of a process in which Europe, which was at that time as a cultural entity quite peripheral and insignificant, started to define and develop itself as the centre of the global environment.

This development was endorsed by a Christian impulse and hope of a chiliastic origin, which is why MOLTSMANN describes it as the birth of the modern world out of the spirit of Messianic hope.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Conquista

The people of Europe, first the Portuguese and Spaniards, and later the British, Dutch and French in the Americas, and the Russians in Siberia, Alaska and the Caucasus, started in 1492 to discover for themselves a *new world*.

To *discover*, however, meant in their case more than finding something previously hidden; it meant the acquisition of the unknown and the Other. *America* is an invention of the discoverers; the *Conquistadores* found what they were looking for because they invented it.<sup>3</sup>

For Christopher COLUMBUS, the names of places in the language of the indigenous people were unimportant, as was their culture. He gave the places he *discovered* new, *Christian* names: naming was thereby an act of claiming possession of the land.

He also interpreted their culture and language according to his expectations—according to what he knew he would find.<sup>4</sup> The myth of a *no man's land* and of *wilderness* served to legalise the robbery, colonisation and settlement of Europeans in these countries.

With the conquest of the Americas, Western European Christendom also embarked upon the domination of the world. The conquest of souls was, however, not motivated by a desire to promote the *Good News*, but to expand *Christian empires*.<sup>5</sup>

Since the Pope gave the newly discovered countries to *Christian emperors* in order to fulfil the task of *Christianising* their inhabitants (insofar as they were regarded as human), the acceptance of the Christian faith was only possible together with submission to European rule.

## 2. Power over Nature

The other source of Modernity is the seizure of power over nature by the development of scientific-technological knowledge. In the era from Nicholas COPERNICUS to Isaac NEWTON, the world became disenchanted—what had been the realm of divine mystery became the area of human control.

“The natural sciences bring *mother nature with her daughters* to the human, who

<sup>2</sup> See MOLTSMANN. 403–407.

<sup>3</sup> For the term and the problem of *inventing America*: DUSSEL Enrique, *Von der Erfindung Amerikas zur Entdeckung des Anderen: Ein Projekt der Transmoderne*. Düsseldorf, 1993. There one can also find important non-Eurocentric perspectives on the development of modernity.

<sup>4</sup> See MOLTSMANN. 403.

<sup>5</sup> See MOLTSMANN. 404.

must be male, in order to make him her *Lord and Master*, as it is expressed in the sexist language of Francis BACON and Rene DESCARTES.<sup>6</sup>

Also in the realm of natural sciences there were *discoveries* made, which are named by their discoverers. And again that *discovery* not only overcomes our ignorance; it is also supposed to place the objects under our power and make us the subjects.

The reason of the natural sciences is always *instrumental reason*: reason with a vested interest that informs its findings (*erkenntnisleitendes Interesse*), the interest of utility and domination.<sup>7</sup>

According to Immanuel KANT's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the modern mind only accepts what it produces itself by its own design. It forces nature to answer its questions. This forcing of nature is called *experiment*, and it has been often compared to the interrogation under torture of the Inquisition.

The natural sciences and technology enabled Europe to obtain that kind of *legislature* that sanctioned the extraction of resources from the *colonised* countries. This exploitation allowed the development of the global network of civilisation, which continues to claim the right of universal validity for its ethos and shape. It is this universal claim that is in question today.<sup>8</sup>

Being the ideological framework of the society that produced such knowledge, Western Christianity assumed its position of claiming to be the religion of the victorious God. Some scientists did it in *exploring* nature, hundreds of workers producing the surplus to finance the science, and even more women and men sacrificing their lives and strength to guarantee the survival of those exploited to deliver the material basis for *progress*.

The dominant, victorious, expanding Western civilisation called its world the *Christian world* and the age of its biggest success in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century the *Christian century*.<sup>9</sup> Although the XX<sup>th</sup> century has seen the secularisation and atheistic reinterpretation of *Christian values*, the Christian origins of the glorification of progress are worth more examination in order to understand the close symbiosis of bourgeois society in its exploitative ignorance towards the Others, and the Christian theology of hope and liberation.

MOLTMANN claims that it was the vision of a *New World* that motivated European expansion into the world. COLUMBUS' motivation to sail to the West was to raise the money needed in order to send Spanish troops to conquer Jerusalem, since Jerusalem was the chiliastic capital of the thousand-year reign of the saints with Christ (*Tausendjähriges Reich*).

The *new world* was seen in the context of the new Heaven and the new Earth of the apocalypse and the coming Messianic age. It is the vision of the *new age*:

“The mobilising and orientating framework of interpretation for the multiple seizure of power by Europe over the world lies in the chiliastic expectation that the saints will

6 See MOLTMANN, 404. „Die Naturwissenschaften bringen 'Mutter Natur mit ihren Töchtern' zum Menschen, der ein Mann sein muß, um diesen zu ihrem 'Herrn und Eigentümer' zu machen, wie es in der sexistischen Sprache Francis BACONS und René DESCARTES heißt.“

7 For the philosophical concept behind this: HORKHEIMER Max – ADORNO Theodor W., *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (tr. CUMMING John). London–New York, 1995.

8 For an early critique of the attempt to adapt philosophy to the standard and method of natural sciences, see Max HORKHEIMER in his critique of pragmatism and positivism: HORKHEIMER Max, *Eclipse of Reason*. New York, 1974. 3–57.

9 See MOLTMANN, 404.

reign with Christ, when he comes, for a thousand years and judge the peoples and that this empire of Christ will be the last and golden age of humankind before the end of the world.”<sup>10</sup>

The Messianic and chiliastic hopes of Christianity have always existed, but with the beginning of the modern age these took on a new quality: the time is *now*; the process of world history is complete, the new and the last age has come.

Through technology and science man (sic) regained what he (sic) had lost with original sin: dominion over the Earth. Now the emancipation of humankind became possible. In the Enlightenment, humans were able to leave behind their mental immaturity and become morally good again.

The reason for this is that in the last millennium, evil is bound so that the good can spread unhindered. The general belief in reason is possible, since in this age humans understand the true and good even without the mediation of the Church, simply because it is the good and true.<sup>11</sup>

The religious question for KANT is simply: What may I hope for?<sup>12</sup> It is the future that makes sense of all life in the present, as well as all of history. And it is this future for which it is legitimate and reasonable to sacrifice the lives of present generations. The future that is hoped for is a new paradigm for modernity: the paradigm of transcendence.

Although there is this *success story* from the point of view of the Western European or the later so-called *Western world* (including North America, Australia and New Zealand), there is the similar excessive history of suffering for all the victims of modernity: there is the history of *sub-modernity*.<sup>13</sup>

The European Messianic upper side of history has its apocalyptic nether side for all the non-male, non-Europeans who happen to be those whose lives and identity would be sacrificed for the transcendent future and for the new and golden age of Christian dominance.

The development of the culture of reason also brought with it the culture of submission of the body, feelings and senses of modern humans. The Other was not accepted in its otherness; it either *conformed* to the prevailing worldview, or it was subjugated.

In short, for the Other the Messianic departure meant apocalyptic destruction. It is the Messianic departure that, in a sense, legitimised the tendency of the *makers* of modernity to assimilate everyone.

The reason for this is that in the final, eschatological age, the only thing that matters is belonging to the saints, to the saved ones, to those who reign with Christ or with HEGEL's world spirit.

Since it is the future that counts, the present, including all the suffering and alienation, is not of real relevance; it is not even real at all, compared to what is hoped for in the transcendent future.

10 „Der mobilisierende und orientierende Deutungsrahmen für die mehrfache Machtergreifung Europas über die Welt liegt in der chiliastischen Erwartung, daß die Heiligen mit Christus, wenn er kommt, für tausend Jahre herrschen und die Völker richten werden und daß dieses Imperium Christi das letzte und goldene Zeitalter der Menschheit vor dem Ende der Welt sein werde.“ MOLTSMANN. 405.

11 See MOLTSMANN. 404.

12 See KANT Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*. A504.: “All interest of my reason (the speculative as well as the practical) unites itself in the following three questions: 1. What am I able to know? 2. What shall I do? 3. What may I hope for?” Quoted in MOLTSMANN. 407.

13 See MOLTSMANN. 407–411.

The overriding of the otherness of the Other is not only a phenomenon that is directed at the outsider; it also signifies the overcoming and disappearance of the individual within the framework of enlightenment.

## II. Objectifying the Other

In turning to the work of Max HORKHEIMER and Theodor W. ADORNO in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, one can find an illustration of the way in which the individual reacts to the alienation brought about in the enlightenment process.

In analysing the phenomenon of worldwide anti-Semitism, and in particular the Holocaust of National-Socialist Germany at that time, they show the rationale behind, and the process of annihilation of, the Other: The urge to dominate nature provides the epistemological and cultural components of anti-Semitism.

HORKHEIMER and ADORNO claim that all “anti-Semitism is based on false projection.”<sup>14</sup> Epistemologically, the quest for knowledge firstly forces the objects of knowledge into categories, thus violently reducing them to nature, the raw material of dominance.

Consciousness of this projection is achieved by the process of reflection. Recognition makes it possible to neutralise this projection. Failure to reflect results in paranoia, necessitating the reduction of everything to that which the *I* already knows or expects, without allowing room for otherness and difference.

At the heart of anti-Semitic thinking is this kind of semi-knowledge, which does not recognise the projection, but takes it already for knowledge. The Other remains trapped, reduced to nature, to the very thing that is dangerous and has to be controlled.

“The morbid aspect of anti-Semitism is not projective behaviour as such, but the absence from it of reflection. When the subject is no longer able to return to the object what he has received from it, he becomes poorer rather than richer. He loses the reflection in both directions: since he no longer reflects the object, he ceases to reflect upon himself, and loses the ability to differentiate.”<sup>15</sup>

In his attitude towards the Jew as the Other, the anti-Semite appeals to *idiosyncrasy*.<sup>16</sup> It is this spontaneous repulsion, which is a natural reflex, which reminds the *I* that she or he has repressed her or his human nature in the course of civilisation.

Civilisation has ceased to deliver to human beings the promised freedom to live according to their natural requirements. By *natural requirements* HORKHEIMER and ADORNO do not mean an unlimited exercise of instincts and sexual urges, but rather they envisage a condition of life where false instincts would be reclaimed and have their place in communal life.

The repressed subject recognises her or his own natural elements in the oppressed Other. This acts as a reminder of the lost aim of civilisation, which cannot be acknowledged because it highlights our own repression and failure. This is the reason for the rage in which she or he tortures the Other.

The masses “must suppress the very possibility and idea of that happiness, the more

14 See HORKHEIMER Max – ADORNO Theodor W. 187–200.

15 See HORKHEIMER Max – ADORNO Theodor W. 189.

16 See HORKHEIMER Max – ADORNO Theodor W. 179–187. In the German usage, “idiosyncrasy” means the spontaneous reaction of aversion towards something, which seems exaggerated, without rational justification, and ignorant of conscious reflection.

relevant it becomes. Wherever it seems to have been achieved despite its fundamental denial, they must repeat the suppression of their own longing. Everything which gives occasion for such repetition, however unhappy it may be in itself, draws upon itself that destructive lust of the civilized person who could never fulfil the process of civilisation. Those who spasmodically dominate nature see in a tormented nature a provocative image of powerless happiness. The thought of *happiness without power* is unbearable, because it would then be *true happiness*.<sup>17</sup>

It is this prolonging of the own suppression that leads the masses to pursue the Other, be it the Jew, the non-European, the unsubjected woman. The Shoa is but the most recent mass genocide in European history.

The seeds of anti-Semitism, racism and misogyny are still dominant in the European and Western world. The deadly consequences of the intellectual attitude towards the Other display the full impact of this failure to engage in reflection.

### III. The Others Speak up

There is a widespread discussion regarding the end of modernity, or post-modern times. The discussion centres on the shortfalls and congenital defects of modern development. Especially within the feminist movements, the discussions have highlighted the deficits of patriarchal modernity in their reflection on patriarchal practice, thereby furthering their analysis of the system.

Today the deficiencies are clearly exposed. Feminist discourse has been consequently ignored within the established circles of science and society, except when the movement was able to amass the power to make its voice heard.

Within the established structures of the academy, the development of the *linguistic turn* and the deconstructivist practice of philosophy, commonly called the *post-modern*, has emerged as a critique. Their discourse is likewise seen as a threat, but one which comes from within rather than from the outside.

Discussing the common and the different aims of feminists and post-modernists, Craig OWENS identifies the cause of the crisis of modernity: it is the discourse of the others.<sup>18</sup> Following Paul RICŒUR, OWENS equates the end of the modern project with the loss of Western sovereignty.

In an encounter with real pluralism, we realise that the Others are not the only *others*, but that we ourselves are *others* among *others*. So in the encounter with different cultural concepts, we risk the loss of identity.

“What is at stake, then, is not only the hegemony of Western culture, but also (our sense of) our identity as a culture. These two stakes, however, are so inextricably intertwined (as Michel FOUCAULT has taught us, the positing of an Other is a necessary moment in the consolidation, the incorporation of any cultural body) that it is possible to speculate that what has toppled our claims to sovereignty is actually the realization that our culture is neither as homogeneous nor as monolithic as we once believed it to be.”<sup>19</sup>

17 See HORKHEIMER Max – ADORNO Theodor W. 179.

18 See OWENS Craig, *The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism*. In FOSTER Hal (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*. London–Sydney, 1985. 57–82.

19 See OWENS Craig, 58.

Where before the *master narratives* (LYOTARD's *grands récits*) of modernity have governed and explained to our culture the reasons for its dominance and legitimised it, there is today a growing awareness that these master narratives are not shared by all peoples and are not necessarily shared within our own culture, since they exclude most women and other groups usually labelled as minorities.

OWENS shows that the critique of master narratives and the acceptance of many cultures are discussed in relation to the issue of the loss of power. Master narratives are the expression of those concepts that were developed "to legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image."<sup>20</sup> In telling a story of liberation, knowledge or reason from any other historical perspective, it is claimed that whatever actions are in line with the respective narrative are justifiable.

But it is not only the telling of a governing story, it is also the process of representation that is at the root of modernity. Drawing on Martin HEIDEGGER, OWENS shows that the modern condition is "that everything that exists does so only in and through representation. To claim this is also to claim that the world exists only in and through a *subject* who believes that she or he is producing the world in producing its representation."<sup>21</sup>

This perspective makes possible the mastery of the world which is reduced to something produced and determined by the subject. Here the critique by HORKHEIMER and ADORNO concurs with HEIDEGGER's observations.

LYOTARD<sup>22</sup> draws attention to history in a similar manner. He claims that the first-person singular narrative chosen by René DESCARTES in the *cogito* is one of the key signs of modernity (concerning the Other).

It is the attempt of the *ego* to master every datum—including itself—in the movement towards emancipation, in order to integrate the Other into the *We*. In the discourse of philosophy the *I* develops the narrative towards a potential *You*.

Any third party—that is, all those outside the discourse—has to be included under the concept of *We*, which essentially consists only of the *I* and the *You*. Thus the *Other* is overcome, integrated and mastered.

Even the narratives of emancipation and liberation have this tendency to *speak for the Other* and thereby are themselves dominating master narratives. With the impulse for the emancipation narrative, however, the impulse also comes out of that by which the master narrative will later be overcome.

In the words of Craig OWENS, the modern project today is in a condition "which is experienced everywhere today as a tremendous loss of mastery. It is clear that what has been lost is not primarily a cultural mastery, but an economic, technical, and political one. For what if not the emergence of Third-World nations, the 'revolt of nature' and the women's movement, that is, the voices of the conquered, has challenged the West's desire for ever-greater domination and control?"<sup>23</sup>

It seems that the discourse of the Others simultaneously includes the voices having

20 OWENS Craig, 64–70.

21 OWENS Craig, 66.

22 See LYOTARD Jean-François, *Universal History and Cultural Differences*. In BENJAMIN Andrew (ed.), *The Lyotard Reader*. Oxford–Cambridge, 1989. 314–323.

23 OWENS Craig, 66.

been excluded for centuries (feminist discourse), while deconstructing the very positions and assumptions which legitimated the exclusion of the Others (post-modern discourse).

Particularly the feminist discourses emphasise the importance of refusing to speak for others, unlike many modern emancipation movements.<sup>24</sup> They criticise the attempts to silence those already silenced by others speaking for them,<sup>25</sup> which opens up new perspectives on the totalising aspects of even liberating projects.

This rough overview of some examples analysing the modern project shows several elements of the way in which the Other is perceived and why it is so. It is the tendency of the male *Ego* to approach the Other according to his own system of representation, which only allows him to know the Other insofar as she or he corresponds to that code.

The particularity of the Other becomes levelled to uniformity, and she or he is objectified as an exchangeable abstract category. In the struggle to exercise sovereignty over nature (everything external to the *I*, who also becomes himself objectified: in the abstract and generalised *I*) the basis of the relationship is mastery, power, exploitation and utility.

Even in the attempt to emancipate, the Other comes into view as someone who must be spoken for, who cannot speak for herself or himself. It seems obvious that the Messianic motivation at the outset of the modern era has led to the alienation of the single human person, which is in direct contradiction to the telling of the Biblical narratives about Jesus Christ or the Reign of God.

#### Suggested Reading

- ASMUS Sören, *I is an Other: Dialogue as First Theology, Emmanuel Levinas and Henning Luther as Sources for Ecumenical Theology*. Dublin, 1996. (unpublished).
- ASMUS Sören, *Sinn und Geschmack für den Anderen: Dialog als Ausgangspunkt der Theologie*. In ASMUS Sören –SCHULZE Manfred (eds.), *Wir haben doch alle denselben Gott: Eintracht, Zwietracht und die Vielfalt der Religionen*. Neukirchen-Vlyun, 2006. 147–186.
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<sup>24</sup> See LYOTARD. 315.

<sup>25</sup> OWENS gives several examples from the area of arts and their theoretical underpinning. See OWENS. 70–77.



Otto KROESEN

# From Empire to Globalization and Oecumene

*In present-day discussions about globalization it is often not quite well understood what kind of process we are involved in under this label. Anti-globalists point to the negative aspects such as large-scale pollution of the environment, persistent poverty, and unjust power relationships.*

*Those in favour of the process point to worldwide competitive prices, a global market, progress in China and India, and to the fact that there seems to be no alternative. It seems, however, as if the emerging world society is a huge ship heading towards disaster, and nobody can find the steering wheel.*

*What is the dynamics behind this emerging worldwide market and society? Is it possible that we might find the steering wheel and give it the right direction, if we adopt a larger perspective—even encompassing thousands of years of world history?*

*This article starts with the old empires, like the Egyptian, in contrast with the Biblical story of Moses and the children of Israel, seeking a higher justice. Then follow some aspects of the revolutionary Western history, in which the endeavour began to revive this imperial tradition while avoiding the violence and oppression present in it. Finally, we might have a better understanding of the ambivalent character of the globalization process and a better judgement of what there is to promote in it and what to resist.*

## **Egypt Against the Tribes: The Encompassing Character of an Empire**

If one looks at the images of the Egyptians depicted in the old temples of this empire, they all look the same. Some are bigger than other ones. Of course those were more important. But all of them are depicted somewhat stiffly with their chest towards the observer, not very relaxed, but definitely in function.

These are very stylized figures; even their clothes are stylized, with few marks of individuality, and the one who takes a closer look might be struck by the fact that they show makeup, but certainly no tattoos, on their naked bodies.

Does this forebode the uniformity of our future global society? In Egypt these functionalized bodies without tattoos meant a conscious opposition to the tribal life before the constitution of the Egyptian Empire, in which the tattoos showed to which tribe one belonged.



Compared to this tribal life form, the constitution of the Egyptian Empire is a major achievement. Imagine how the tribes would have lived in the valley of the Nile. Of course these were very fruitful areas, but unexpectedly the river Nile might start rising, often very quickly.

Suddenly, it might cover instead of an area of a few hundred meters an area as wide as thirty kilometres and in this way all the villages where the tribes lived would be drowned. All of a sudden everybody had to leave and it takes little imagination to assume that many conflicts and struggles between the tribes would arise in this predicament.

What the Pharaohs and their priests achieved was replacing the tribal system of ancestor worship and mutual hostilities by the imperial system, in which the Pharaoh reigned instead of the ancestors and in which thousands of people along thousands of kilometres along the Nile were united in one social system, top-down, hierarchical in the literal sense.

The Pharaoh on top was a son of the gods and his priests were at the same time his civil servants. It was as if the state system and the church were fused into one. Of course, it was the other way around.

It would last some thousands of years before the state (as a secular state) and the church would be distinguished from each other and form separate institutions. In Egypt as in all empires the secular order is also the religious order, since there is no other order to obey.

A key aspect of this social system was flood control. In this respect the star Sirius, which roundabout 2700 B.C. appeared in July above the horizon, played an important role. If this star started being visible above the horizon in the morning next to the rising sun, it meant that the river Nile would begin to rise.

With the help of the course of the stars, the Pharaoh and his priests invented the agricultural calendar and from then on people started to live within the confines of a divine cosmos in which the Gods (the *heavenly hosts*) regulated the life of ordinary mortals.

During three months of the year, as long as the flood of the river Nile lasted, the Egyptians would work on the pyramids and other building constructions of the Pharaohs. After that the farmers would start working each on their own little pieces of land, which were divided among them by the priests of the Pharaoh.

Looking at the stars along the river Nile made it possible to obey the same calendar along these thousands of kilometres and turned Egypt into the granary of antiquity even during the Roman Empire.

In reaction to the tribal life in Egypt, tattoos were forbidden as well as ancestral worship. Instead, from that point on the ancestors themselves were supposed to be judged in the afterlife. Thanks to Egypt and other empires, labour division and functional behaviour within large production units became lasting achievements in human history. No wonder that both labourers and civil servants were depicted in stylized functional postures.

From this origin also the Biblical idea of a heavenly kingdom arose. The claim and ambition of the Egyptian Empire, as well as other empires, was to unite all people on Earth. And at the beginning of the Egyptian Empire, when all the tribes along the river Nile were united, one can easily imagine that the people of that time believed that the whole world was there.

It was only later that they discovered the world to be much bigger, after their imperial system was copied and alternative imperial systems developed in many other places. But even to us the term *Empire* still has the ring of this claim in it that eventually it will include and should unite all people all over the world. This eschatological longing is also present in the Biblical term *Reign of God* or *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Looking at it from this perspective, one might already pose the question: what does it mean, that this promise of Egypt which accompanied the empires throughout world history (including the Chinese Empire, which claimed to be universal too), in the XX<sup>th</sup> century is realized by the system of world states, after all remaining emperors were deposed (the German emperor, the emperor of Austria, the Tsar of Russia, the emperor of China, while the emperor of Japan was only left with an ornamental function)?

### **A Closed World: The Prophetic Criticism from Israel**

What started off as a new achievement in world history, as so many times happens, soon became an oppressive force itself. The Egyptian Empire after a while turned all human beings into production units (and consumption units, as far as it went) under central state control.

The eternal problem of empires has been that in the end farmers only existed to be squeezed and that within the hierarchical political system no differences and no dissident voices were allowed.

Sooner or later this made them run into a deadlock, into rebellion and the installation of another dynasty, which was supposed to restore justice. This was not only the problem of imperial China, but also already of Egypt and Babel, as it is also quite acutely shown by the Biblical story of the opposition of Moses and his brother Aaron to the Pharaoh.

As well it is reflected in the story of the Tower of Babel, which was destroyed *by God* (who had to come a long way from Heaven to take a look at this small tower) with the help of the differences in the languages people spoke.

It is striking that the story of Noah tells about a big flood which was overcome by the ark, a ship in the form of a pyramid, into which every human being had to enter in order to survive, but which should also be left exactly after one year (the calendar, dates and times, as well as measurement yardsticks are abundant in the story of Noah).

The message might be that also the prophets of Israel considered the imperial system of Egypt to be a necessary phase in history, but that it should not be treated as the end of all wisdom. After one year (is it a symbol of the great year of 1460 years, in which in Egypt, not counting with intercalary days as we do, the stars would appear on the same spot again in heaven?) everybody needed to leave this system.

Just as Abraham was called upon to leave his city in Babel and look for a justice which was not guaranteed by the agricultural calendar and the stars of Heaven, but which was invisible and yet to come—the promised land.

To Israel the God of justice is the God of the future, invisible in the present, but coming towards us if we prepare the road of justice (Psalm 85). Always the prophets of Israel have criticized the powers that be, criticized their own system of kings and imperial power, which also tried to introduce the agricultural calendar in Israel in the form of the worship of Baal and his heavenly hosts, the stars.

The criticism of the prophets means that the future, which is unknown and unexplored and not experienced yet, has more normative value and should be trusted more and have more weight than the visible powers of kings and emperors alike.

### **Church History: From the Margin to the Centre**

As compared to the tribes and the empires, Israel initiated a new life form, a rather impossible one indeed. Tradition and authority was what counted for the tribes. Those living in the present were still ruled by the deceased ancestors, whom they always tried to reconcile by means of their gifts and offerings.

The cyclical calendar of agricultural life in the empires of Egypt and elsewhere can be considered as an eternal present, repeating itself each year. Both life forms were denied by Israel, taking its inspiration from the future.

The future is not a prolongation of the past. The real *future tense* in human speech is the imperative, as it is also the shortest and maybe oldest form of the verb. The imperative for love and justice is the guiding principle of Israel.

It is an impossible principle and actually not a principle at all. A principle can be guaranteed by princes and authorities, but novelty, new ways of life and a higher justice, do not have any guarantee. They depend on the ones who believe in them.

In a certain sense this leads to a rather negative attitude of the Old Testament prophets. They always point to a future beyond the present by criticizing the injustices of those in power. The synagogue took its position on the margin of history, criticizing and waiting.

After Jesus Christ the New Testament Church took over the heritage of Israel, but from now on the arrow would point in the other direction, *from the margin to the centre*. Instead of criticizing and waiting, the Church puts in action a process of constant change.

The Church looked back from the future to the present in order to change it. The criticism of Israel was transformed into a process of gradual change of the *status quo*. The Jews who joined the Church stopped with circumcision and were allowed into all kinds of professions which were prohibited in the past, but they did not leave these old traditions of tribes or empires unchanged and unchallenged.

It has often been stated that the Virgin Mary replaced the heathen goddesses of fertility and that many saints of the Church replaced the old heroes of tribal life (and gods in mythology), but in both instances the adaptation also meant a change.

A bridge was created between the old life forms of the tribes and empires and the future of justice promised to Israel. This could only be done in a process of constant regeneration and self-denial, always prepared to leave old traditions behind in order to take the next step in the process. It meant a life of self-denial, which was also a life of constant regeneration and rebirth, in the footsteps of death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So many times it has been said that Judaism and Islam constitute a way of life, and then by extension it is supposed that Christianity would merely introduce a belief system. I would contend that Christianity means a way of life too.

It means the constant process of self-denial and rebirth, cross and resurrection, in

which the tension between the status quo and a future life of justice and integrity is turned itself into a way of life.

But it does not seem to be a life form, because it is not static, it gives no identity. What it gives is the constant giving up of a fixed identity. It is always on the move, constantly changing the face of the Earth.

## **The Roman Catholic Church and the Nation States of Europe**

The very division between the secular and the religious sphere is a creation of this life form. The Church of the Middle Ages introduced a distinction between *temporalia* and *spiritualia*, a division between temporal authorities and eternal ones.

The Church could not do away with the powers of the state, but it took away the religious reverence for emperors and other political authorities by the very name *state*, which is connected to *status quo*, the situation as it simply happens to be.

You might have to accept it, but it does not have the final word. *Spiritualia*, however, meant those things which the Church should not accept, in which change was urgent. The Church of the Middle Ages, for instance, did not accept marriages arranged by the tribes.

They wanted to break the power of the tribes by means of freedom of partner choice for the future couple and administration of marriages by the Church. The tribes resisted heavily and the outcome was a compromise, where the earthly possessions of the future couple would be dealt with under tribal law, but the marriage itself would be bound by the Church and in Heaven.

The separation between Church and state did not start with the French Revolution as it is supposed so many times, but by the initiative of the Church itself during the Middle Ages. Under the jurisdiction of the state those aspects of life would be subsumed which could not be changed for the moment, but had to be withstood.

And it was the business of the Church to change those aspects of life which were at the present moment ripe and open for change. In this vein monks and nuns started to introduce new methods of agriculture, building, education and medical service and all kinds of different civilizing work.

They became so efficient in organizing people that everything beyond the sphere of the military power of the Emperor and nobility finally was in the hands of the Church. In opposition to that the nation states of Europe gradually started to take over this administrative authority of the Church. In this respect the Reformation (Germany), the Commonwealth of Great Britain (Great Rebellion and Glorious Revolution) and the French Revolution were important milestones.

## **Unity and Multiformality in Europe**

The very distinction between the sphere of the secular and of the sacred or religious is a Christian invention. In a process of constant regeneration the *status quo* always becomes secularized and robbed of its authority.

The future at the same time is always stormed with religious zeal. The peculiar thing is that even the secular revolutions, in which nation states took over the power of organizing society from the Church, were conducted with religious zeal.

This leads and has always led to a dialectic between unity and plurality in Europe. In the Middle Ages the unity of Europe was strived for over and against the dividing powers of the tribes and local warlords.

The Roman Catholic church took the lead in creating this unity, which consisted in a shared quest to bring future justice on Earth. After the Middle Ages the nation states developed a plurality of ways towards that future, which still was the unifying force behind them.

But from that time on the different nation states developed a different national lifestyle, adopting different principles and human qualities, by means of which the future justice should be realized.

In *Germany* the high nobility took the lead. The princes of Germany took over the administration of society, but accepted checks and controls from the side of the Church in the form of the constant advice of theologians and jurists.

Conscious responsibility, discipline, thorough criticism, scholarship and freedom of profession became the human achievements by which the German principalities and cities were organized.

In *Great Britain*, however, the lower nobility took the lead. They gathered in the House of Commons and enforced their legitimate powers upon the King, who could from that point on only make decisions with their consent.

In their opposition against the King (for which the expression the *most loyal opposition* was used) it was important for the Commons to preserve unity. Team spirit, public spirit, trustworthiness, loyalty and tradition became the human characteristics by which Great Britain was organized.

In *France*, at the same time, ordinary civilians took over the lead against both the King and the nobility. From then on no special privileges would be granted, but each individual would have a say only thanks to the authority of her or his own sincerity, naturalness and reason. Public opinion, passionate speech, reason, sincerity and human rights protecting the individual became the historical achievements by which France was organized.

In *Russia* the planning mentality, organizing production by means of totalitarian calculation in order to meet the needs of the masses, became the peculiar characteristic. These characteristics and human qualities were reflected in institutions which supported and maintained them, and these characters and institutions were also inherited by other nations and cultures.

France took over the civil servant system from Germany at the beginning of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, after Louis XIV gathered the rebellious nobility in Versailles. The Western democracies, including the United States, adopted massive state control and economic planning from the USSR after 1930 during the Great Depression.

England borrowed the principles of the French Revolution by means of the Industrial Revolution during the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, avoiding as much as it could that its political system would also be affected by it, in which it did not succeed after all.

All in all we can conclude that the economic and political organization of larger territories in Europe was not achieved merely by totalitarian power seizures, although many revolutionary groups would not have hesitated to do so, if they could.

But instead it was achieved by a plurality of institutions and human types and systems of law, constantly influencing each other and interfering with each other against the background of a shared drive for realizing future justice on this Earth. Globalization is the fruit of this process and should be understood within this perspective.

Compared to the Egyptian Empire, the system of states in the present world has no central authority which would be in control of each and every thing. There is no hierarchy, but rather a plurality of forces, mutually adapting to each other, and in search of a common future.

It is actually the drive forward, the belief in an impossible future, which becomes realized by the mere force of this belief, that has opened up the cyclical imperial system from Egypt to China. This drive forward constituted the revolutionary spirit throughout Western history and initiated time and again new trials and errors as well.

And for that reason also new institutions, new historical achievements and corresponding human qualities were initiated. Because of this thrust forward the plurality within the Western world meant more than just a process of mutual adaptation.

It has always been also a process of mutual interpenetration and recognition, mutual reception of each others' contributions by an often painful dialogue. Painful, because it was not without conflict.

The multiformity of Europe was not the result of tolerance, but much more the result of intolerance. On the basis of a common quest for future justice, however, the struggling parties were forced to listen to what the other one had to say, even if they did not like it. This is the political way of loving *thy enemies* in Western history.

### **Worldwide Economy and Æcumene: The Great Dialogue of Humankind**

Now what do we gain from this historical perspective on globalization? The first thing is that even the deficient worldwide economic and social system of states of our times is the provisional result of the combination of unity and plurality of Western history.

It is undeniable that the present system of states is derived mostly from the West. That does not mean, however, that it is justified that the West dominates the rest. In contrast, it is futile to talk about globalization and about open markets, if in fact only a few big players are in control of the market.

But it still is the thrust forward and the accompanying plurality, which is constitutive and indispensable for the process of globalization itself. This Judeo-Christian drive forward took possession of the whole planet in whatever superficial and distorted form.

But it still is most certain that the different civilizations and nation states will not tolerate each other, if each of them considers its own religious or cultural heritage as the final word and therefore as an absolute.

Only if history is not finished yet and if nobody can consider her or his traditions as an absolute, can civilizations and individuals have something to say to each other, something to which the other should listen too.

The acceptance of the Judeo-Christian thrust into the future as the driving force of civilization for that reason is conditional to any form of globalization and to the opening up of human civilizations and individuals for each other.

Since this thrust is behind the process of globalization, the open market and the system of states, it is not very helpful if people oppose the process of globalization because of the negative aspects of it.

In my view the anti-globalists should not long for a past which has never existed, but instead they should look further into the future as their opponents do. They should not beg for less globalization, but for more.

An open market can only function on the basis of equal rights and equal opportunities, not only for the big players, but also for small ones; and that requires minimum wages and some sort of social safety net and a shared system of law all over the world.

An open society is a society in which a plurality of cultural heritages can enter into the *great dialogue of humankind* in the common search of what is true and human and truly human, a conversation which may not be blocked or controlled by anyone in advance.

It is not true that the system of production or the economy or society in general is organized separately from the cultural values, historical achievements and human qualities which originated in human history.

These historical achievements and human qualities in turn are conditional and constitutive for an economically viable, sustainable, just and peaceful society. In this process, every human quality and historical achievement which has once brought peace in the past, somehow will have also a role to play in the future.

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Bogdan POPESCU

# Ambrosius, the Bishop who Defeated an Emperor

*The close cooperation between the Empire and the Christian Church after the Edict of Mediolanum (Milano) in 313 led to a new social, political and cultural order called the Byzantine Symphony.*

*The Church had a very good framework for mission, but encountered another threat: the influence of the political partner. Therefore, members of the Church of the fourth century tried to overcome this new danger.*

*Their means was most of all a better delimitation of the “borders” between these two important and separate fields. AMBROSIOUS, the bishop of Mediolanum, was one of the significant voices that rose against the abuses of the Empire.*

## Historical Framework

Having a broad experience in the imperial administration, as *Consularis Liguriæ et Æmiliæ*, AMBROSIOUS of Mediolanum understood the necessity of the clear separation between political and religious duties.

He actually succeeded in emphasizing these limits in a quite difficult and complex historical period, when very different, stronger or weaker emperors came to power, one after the other. As an excellent diplomat and politician, AMBROSIOUS knew how to deal with each of them in order to serve the interests and mission of the Church.

After the death of VALENTINIANUS I in 375, the Western part of the Empire was ruled by his two sons, GRATIANUS (375–388) and VALENTINIANUS II (375–392); while the Eastern part was taken by the Hispanic general THEODOSIUS after the tragic death of VALENS in 378.

The situation got even more complicated when GRATIANUS was killed in 388, and the Western part (except Italy and Africa) was controlled by MAXIMUS, supported by the legions from Britannia.<sup>1</sup>

Emperor VALENTINIANUS II was also killed in the year 392, so EUGENIUS became the emperor for only about two years, before he was finally defeated by THEODOSIUS in the battle of Aquileia.<sup>2</sup>

1 PASINI Cesare, *Ambrogio di Milano. Azione e Pensiero di un Vescovo*. Milano, 1996. 89.

2 PAREDI Angelo, *Ambrogio e la sua Età*. Milano, 1960. 491, 500.

Despite all these political instabilities and enmities, which were mainly provoked by the various civil wars, Bishop AMBROSIUS knew how to influence the most important political decisions.

The different relationships of the Christian Church and its leaders with the emperors were very diverse. In case of GRATIANUS, for instance, the bishop became a counsellor of the young ruler.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand the relationship with VALENTINIANUS, still a child at that time, was much tenser because of the imperial favours granted to the adepts and believers of Arianism or Roman polytheism.

The most interesting relationship, however, was established with THEODOSIUS. The latter took important decisions in favour of Christians: he was baptised and he gave up the ancient title of *Pontifex Maximus* (supreme pontiff).

Furthermore, he made Christianity the official religion of the Empire through the Edict *Cunctos Populos* in 380; he forbade the religious sacrifices and the Olympic Games and closed many temples.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, he had an open conflict with the bishop of Milano because of the massacre that took place in Thessalonica at the initiative of THEODOSIUS, who wanted to heavily punish the population.

The emperor had to ask for forgiveness and reconciliation in order to avoid being excommunicated and had to be a penitent for eight long months before Christmas of the year 390.<sup>5</sup>

### Political Doctrines of AMBROSIUS

Historians considered AMBROSIUS to be the archetype of the powerful Cardinal RICHELIEU and stressed his attempt to establish the legitimate borders between *Imperium* (Empire) and *Sacerdotium*.

He did not reject the general principles of the Byzantine Symphony, useful both for the State and for the Church at the same time, but tried to formulate a new unofficial *contract* of this cooperation.

First of all, he underlined the different fields of the two dignities: the emperor had no right whatsoever to rule the Church, because he was just a regular member of it, and had no longer the privileges of the Roman Pontifex Maximus.

Only the representatives of the Christian Church had the right to make decisions in the field of religious life, and therefore the attempt of the Roman Senator SYMMACHUS to reintroduce the statue of Victory in the Senate had no chance at all.

Even Emperor VALENTINIANUS II was forced to take into serious consideration the open protest of Bishop AMBROSIUS, who warned the emperor on the rather negative effects of this grave *sacrilege*.<sup>6</sup>

AMBROSIUS underlined the fact that the two institutions should have very different methods and quite differing means as well: "The priest should fulfil his task, and the emperor should fulfil his own."<sup>7</sup>

3 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter I*. MPL XVI. Col. 876C–879A.

4 BARNES Timothy D., *Religion and Society in the Age of Theodosius*. In MEYNELL Hugo A. (ed.), *Grace, Politics and Desire*. Calgary, 1990. 160.

5 RAHNER Hugo, *L'glise et l' tat dans le Christianisme Primitif*. Paris, 1964. 107.

6 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter XVII*. MPL XVI. Col. 962B.

7 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *The Sermon against Auxentius*. MPL XVI. Col. 1013A.

They could cooperate and transform people into good *Christian citizens*, but only if they did not mix their precise goals and tasks. He wrote in a letter to his sister MARCELLINA the following famous lines:

“Those who belong to God are not subdued to the power of the emperor.”<sup>8</sup> The bishop accused AUXENTIUS, one of the promoters of Arianism, because he supported entrusting the administration of the Church to the state in order to gain manifold and important political privileges.

In his view, priests and the bishops should show respect to the political leaders, but they should not be frightened or influenced by them at all, because the real ruler and leader of the world is God.

The emperor should be within the Church, and not above it: “*Imperator enim intra Ecclesiam, non supra Ecclesiam est.*”<sup>9</sup> He had to be aware that his kingdom was protected by the grace of God.

Also, he had to acknowledge that the representatives of the Church could be *divine messengers* in a social or political context. The imperial absolutism, however, the dream of Julius CÆSAR applied by the emperors of the first three centuries, encountered an unexpected obstacle: a formerly persecuted Church.

THEODOSIUS was also advised to follow the good example of David, because the whole Empire could be punished for the sins of its rulers. Penitence was no longer a personal option, but instead became a political issue.<sup>10</sup>

While the Roman imperial religion transformed its emperors into gods, Christianity forced them to accept again the status of human beings, and AMBROSIUS succeeded in anticipating in the fourth century the penitence that was to take place in Canossa in 1077.<sup>11</sup>

We should not consider this event as an attempt to transform the Roman state into a Christian democracy, but we can rightly think that the Oriental idea of the divine ruler and the absolute power lost this way a quite important battle, after so many victories in the previous centuries.

On the other hand, AMBROSIUS was convinced that the representatives of the Church should not be involved in politics, but they should only react in very critical and crucial moments of history.

The role should have been that of a *common denominator* in a fragmented and divided world. AMBROSIUS, however, supported THEODOSIUS in his civil war, calling EUGENIUS *usurpator indignus* (unworthy and undignified usurper) and the Frank general ARBOGASTES *barbarus latro* (Barbarian robber).<sup>12</sup>

The bishop also accepted the idea of a *bellum iustum* (just war) that could defend the values of the Christian Empire. In a time when the Goths were gradually settling in the Balkans and the Persians and Germanic tribes were attacking the borders, he claimed the right to use force for defense.

8 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter XX*. MPL XVI. Col. 996B–997A.

9 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *The Sermon against Auxentius*. MPL XVI. Col. 1018B.

10 CRACCO RUGGINI Lellia, *Potere Romano e Coscienza Etica Cristiana*. In DAL COVOLO Enrico – UGLIONE Renato (eds.), *Chiesa e Impero. Da Augusto a Giustiniano*. Roma, 2001. 138.

11 MCLYNN Neil B., *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital*. Los Angeles – London, 1994. 331.

12 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter LXI*. MPL XVI. Col. 1186C.

The bishop wrote to VALENTINIANUS: All the people who are under the Roman rule fight for you, emperors and masters of the land, the way you also fight for the almighty God and for the holy faith in God.<sup>13</sup>

The ancient *Pax Romana* that was considered *Pax Deorum* (a gift of the gods) became a *Pax Christi*.<sup>14</sup> Although he claimed the independency of the Church, AMBROSIUS did not intend to isolate Christians from Roman society.

His thought could be considered a kind of middle way between the Augustinian dichotomy and the Eusebian cooperation. He even used the famous expression of Saint AUGUSTINE of Hippo, *civitas superna* (the city from above).

Since it is different from the *civitas terrena* (city of the Earth), he therefore asked the members of the Church to be good citizens and to coexist with the *terræ filii* (children of the Earth).<sup>15</sup>

The framework provided by the state was necessary for the Church to survive in the anarchy of the world: “The wise people rule by force over the madness of the crowds, because those have to be ruled by force, obliged through the authority of power to obey the wise ones and to respect the laws.”<sup>16</sup>

## Ecumenical Influence

The thought of AMBROSIUS is still very important in our contemporary society, because those who do not want to remember the lessons of history have indeed great chances to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Even though the citizens of many countries in the world live in largely secularized countries, the political power from time to time still tries to control and supervise the activities of the churches.

Even though many constitutions and basic laws in a lot of countries grant a clear separation between religion and society, the state is very much involved and it interferes in religious life in many places.

This involvement, however, may take very diverse forms, according to the different countries and traditions: it could be a direct and visible influence in the administrative field or just an indirect way, through the funds granted to the churches.

Contemporary religious leaders should really remember the prophetic voice of AMBROSIUS, the bishop of Milano, and they should not accept but firmly refuse the domination of the political structures.

Of course, the situation is different in the context of the actual process of *globalization*, because the symphonic relationship between the early Church and the Roman Empire became the *pluralistic* relationship between many Churches and several empires, but the problems remain similar.

The Christian Church must never become a mere institution of the state, isolated in the fields of education and social assistance, but it should be a respected partner

13 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter XVII*. MPL XVI. Col. 961B.

14 PIZZOLATO Luigi Franco, *Ambrogio e la Libertà Religiosa nel IV Secolo*. In DAL COVOLO Enrico – UGLIONE Renato (eds.), *Chiesa e Impero. Da Augusto a Giustiniano*. Roma, 2001. 282.

15 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter LXXIV*. MPL XVI. Col. 1256C.

16 AMBROSIUS of Mediolanum, *Letter XXXVII*. MPL XVI. Col. 1085C–D., 1086A.

who is able to influence the decisions of the state, of course according to the Christian understanding and social teachings.

The political leaders could be either *intra Ecclesiam* (within the Church), or even *extra Ecclesiam* (outside the Church), but in any case, as AMBROSIOUS well stressed, *non supra Ecclesiam* (not at all over the Church).

The Christian *ecumenical* movement plays a great and significant role in this field as well because the denominations could be much stronger, provided they react together to the challenges posed by the secular world and by its political situations and decisions.

At the beginning of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century, the national and regional, political and social structures have a tendency to *coagulate* in order to form new modern empires in different parts of the world.

And at the same time, the religious world is still too much divided and it is basically unable to follow the rhythm of economic and political unions. Therefore, the ecumenical movement could be an effective solution, an answer proper and apt to the new challenges that the denominations have to face today.

One thousand six hundred and twenty-six years have passed since Emperor THEODOSIUS, highly influenced by Bishop AMBROSIOUS of Milano, made Christianity the official religion of the Empire through the great Edict *Cunctos Populos*.

And in our age the contemporary denominations are not able even to mention the great and decisive role played by Christianity through centuries in the Constitution of the European Union (EU).

Of course, religious leaders should not be allowed to get involved in political life, but they still have the moral duty to influence the life of the modern empires, among others to fulfil the great testament of AMBROSIOUS.

They have to accept and respect the civil structures, the legislation and the human rights, but at the same time they have to react together, to overcome the new challenges, to keep the Christian testimony in the secular modern empires alive and blossoming.

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Robert TULIP

# The Human Number: Theological Reflections on Empire

*In the Bible story of Jonah, God tells the prophet to go to Ninevah, a city on the Tigris River in present-day Iraq, to foretell its doom. Jonah is terrified by this divine command and tries to escape by ship.*

*God is determined to fulfill the original plan and sends a storm of such ferocity that Jonah asks his fellow sailors to save themselves by tossing him into the sea, as he knows his prophetic knowledge is the source of the problem.*

*A whale swallows him and coughs him up on shore after three days. Jonah then does God's bidding and goes to Ninevah. Upon his arrival in the evil city, he tells the Ninevans of the impending divine wrath.*

*To Jonah's surprise, the residents accept his advice and repent of their sins. Even more amazingly, God then forgives Ninevah, telling Jonah their repentance has saved the city from the punishment predicted earlier.*

*Jonah was an ordinary person burdened with an extraordinary message. He felt deeply angry towards God, firstly for presenting him with such a dangerous prophecy, and then for making him endure a terrible storm, three days in the belly of a whale and the social confrontation in Ninevah. When God failed to carry out the original destructive promise in which he had invested so much expectation, Jonah wanted to die.*

## Status of Revelation

The story of Jonah, with its message of repentance leading to unexpected forgiveness and reconciliation, is recounted here to introduce a new look at that most controversial of Biblical themes, the central prophecy of the apocalypse, the human number 666.

God's forgiveness of Ninevah shows how expectations can be proved wrong when the divine presence reveals itself through a higher wisdom. Perhaps the stories of the apocalypse will have an equally unexpected outcome?

The prophecy of the apocalypse is central to Christian faith and places Christianity in a special position as the world religion which most explicitly addresses God's intervention in history. But the nature of this intervention is far from clear.

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The Book of Revelations, the weird vision which closes the New Testament, is difficult to discuss rationally. The overwhelming nature of its images such as resurrection of the dead and the battle of Armageddon—and the impossibility of fundamentalist interpretations—has made rational people deeply wary of discussing it, leading many to deride the predictions of the Bible as irrelevant.

Within theology, interpretation has long been split into liberal and fundamentalist camps. Both, for opposite reasons, see an unbridgeable gap between modern thought and Bible stories of the end times.

The liberal approach dismisses the images of revelation as symbolic explanations of the trials of the early Church. At the other extreme, fundamentalists hold to unscientific beliefs such as the rapture of the faithful, assuming the allegories of the Bible are literally true.

Literal readings deserve scepticism, but it is equally wrong to assume modern rationality has the last word. The possibility that Revelation could contain a real historical prophecy from Jesus Christ is often denied because the literal story is farfetched, but this denial amounts to rejection of a central message of the Christian faith.

Cutting through this debate, this essay suggests that Revelation contains a simple and accurate prediction which goes to the centre of the relation between humanity and reality. Looking past the fearful visions, this essay presents a new reading of Revelation, with the aims of justifying the claim of Christianity to a unique understanding of the structure of world history and reclaiming the Christian vision as the guiding light of human civilization.

## A New Reading

The key text is Revelation 13, which predicts a time when “People ... worshipped the beast, saying ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’ ... And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation... so that no one can buy or sell unless one has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let one who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty six.”

The interpretation explored here is that this prophecy of the beast of the apocalypse predicts the current dominant place in world affairs of the United States of America.

In the terms of the question “who is like the beast and who can fight against it?” the power of the United States is indeed such that no one equals her. U.S. leadership of the world seems beyond challenge, now that it has become the first state ever to dominate the Earth as a sole superpower, fulfilling the circumstance at the core of the Biblical prophecy.

The prophecy suggests a time when the world would be ruled by a person and a currency whose common number is 666. This prophecy, intriguingly, is exactly fulfilled by the United States dollar and the recent American President Ronald Wilson REAGAN. Together the Dollar and REAGAN exercised the world leadership predicted by the Bible, and they both have six letters in each of their three names.

## A Global Eschatology

Identification of the USA as 666 implies the current time is the *end of the age* predicted in the Bible. The Bible actually indicates that no time before now could have been the end of the age when Jesus says “this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24,14).

Only now, when Western society has contacted every part of the world, accompanied by the Christian Church, has this condition been fulfilled. Only now, with the arrival of globalization, has the Gospel truly been preached to the whole world, setting the scene for the end of the age, as a rupture of the old Earth in the terms Paul predicted in Romans 8,22 rather than as the rapture of traditional fundamentalism.

There are signs that such a broad shift in epoch is underway. The age of colonial imperialism is drawing to a close, while globalization is emerging as a defining principle of the new age.

This interpretation sets a definite historical boundary to the notion of the *close of the age* presented in the Bible. But, recalling God’s unexpected forgiveness of Ninevah in the story of Jonah, the end of the age need not mean the end of humanity.

Rather, it should be a time of promise and opportunity, a time of discarding the unjust and worn out ways of the old age, a time to begin a new age and make all things new, as envisioned in Revelation 21,5.

The challenge presented by the new age is to make the principle of love the basis for public policy. This is not a simple matter of redistribution, but of finding ways to re-order economic and social systems to make globalization sustainable, and to ensure that principles such as merit, justice, inclusion and ecology hold sway.

The growth of globalization is a defining social reality. Technology increasingly allows standards to be harmonized by communication, making the concealment of evil difficult. Such transparency means the coming age will display the *rule of principle* over power.

By contrast, 2000 years ago the last age responded to the message of divine truth, in the person of Jesus Christ, with crucifixion. Such a response was only possible because at that time imperial power exercised such dominance over principle.

We are in the midst of transition from a society ordered on the basis of belief to a society ordered on the basis of knowledge. This unfolding transformation in human history is a turning point between epochs, away from the stage in human evolution in which no final certainty was available and into an age where scientific knowledge is becoming the basis of human activity.

False beliefs, which formerly underpinned all social practices at some level, are steadily becoming less tenable. The spread to the entire planet of scientific knowledge leaves no room for people to make decisions based on beliefs which are demonstrably false. This is leading to the sweeping away of untrue beliefs and the creation of a *new age of knowledge*.

## The USA in World History

If belief was the ruling theme of the last two millennia, the United States as 666 represents the culmination of the old culture of false belief and of the imperial military epoch. The United States, as the dominant power of this age, continues in some essential respects to apply *imperial* principles which came to prominence at the time of Jesus Christ and which characterize the whole of the age of belief.

In particular, American reliance on military power as the guarantor of state policy stands in a direct historical line of descent from Roman imperial practice. Armed force will undoubtedly remain a basis of security, but U.S. military policy is so grandly bizarre, with its nuclear weapons and other excesses, that its policies are clearly not rational.

Another element of imperialism is its heedless frontier attitude towards the natural world. This mentality is the greatest threat to biodiversity and climate. The imperial principle of state domination is based on false beliefs and is manifestly not adequate to global needs, making the end of the age of belief an urgent matter.

The brutality inflicted by Western imperial powers on people at their margins has been extreme. From ancient Rome through the colonial period to the present, Western rule has been a bringer of death for indigenous cultures.

When Jesus confronted the Roman Empire and his own religion with God's demand to love those at the margins, the instinctive brutal response was to crucify and persecute the messenger. A similar arrogant streak, albeit much humanised, remains prominent in U.S. behaviour today.

## Biblical Critique of U.S. Culture

The United States is in many ways a religious society, but mainstream U.S. Christianity is doing little to slow the destructive trends. Instead, it promotes a selfish individual doctrine of redemption which looks to save souls from the world, rather than seeking an integrated vision of how the world might be saved from itself.

Yet the Bible says that God came into the world through Jesus Christ not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (John 3,17). Jesus says that people will be judged by their works of compassion (Matthew 25,31–46).

Against this guiding Christian spirit of love, the U.S. ethos is dangerously lacking. The dominant American culture is far from Jesus Christ, even in its so-called Christian aspects, having accepted a number of false values which threaten the future of humanity and the world.

The self-absorption of the consumer society is inimical to an ethic of love and conceals beneath the material success major problems that are unsustainable in their present form. At their root is the power of money.

## The USA and the 666

The United States dollar, the monetary foundation of our world system, exactly fulfills the Bible's prophecy of a time when 'no one can buy or sell unless he has ... the 666.' The USA has led the world financial system since the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference established the dollar as the reserve currency for international trade. All

money now ultimately depends on exchange against the United States dollar for its value, making the dollar the basis of our world financial system, in precise fulfillment of the prophecy.

The correlation between the 666 and Ronald Wilson REAGAN is equally simple as a fulfillment of the Biblical prediction of a person with unrivalled authority. REAGAN remains a leading icon of U.S. power, in large part because of his emphasis on security through military domination rather than through peaceful relationships.

His and nuclear brinkmanship was a main factor which to me made the coincidence of his name and the 666 so disturbing. The world was indeed lucky to escape nuclear war in the 1980s with REAGAN at the helm.

The Bible says the 666 is a human number, meaning something deeply embedded at the centre of human life which continually tempts us to deny God. The U.S. dollar fulfills this requirement more than anything else.

Worship of money is a dominant theme of modern society, an idolatry which puts the United States and kindred societies (including ) in direct conflict with the teaching of Jesus Christ that we cannot serve both God and Mammon.

The Bible says that understanding the human dimension of the 666 calls for wisdom. This can only mean we should look for the 666 in something with a long-standing presence in the life of the world, with a direct continuity back to Jesus Christ's teachings on the nature of sin.

The dollar fulfills these conditions precisely, considering Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 6,10 that the love of money is the root of all evil. Looking for the human dimension of the 666 in this way shows the error of the common tendency to imagine the 666 as something mysterious or alien, an upwelling from a Satanic underworld, rather than looking where the Bible clearly says we should, at the major central features of fallen human life.

The correlation between the 666 and the U.S. dollar suggests the 666 is the defining message from God of the danger of the corrupting power of money. Acceptance of this interpretation could give the United States the capacity honestly to analyse its behaviour against Christian principles, just as Ninevah repented when it heard the message from God through Jonah. The issue here, however, is corruption, rather than finance as such, given the need to retain a rigorous understanding of the relation between economics and poverty.

It is a conundrum how the Bible could contain the devastating critique of the United States suggested here when Christianity contributed so much to U.S. success through the Puritan tradition. The Bible endorses essential U.S. ideals including liberty, adherence to principle and respect for hard work. Jesus gave his blessing to freedom of enterprise and prudent investment in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25,29), where he said "to every one who has will more be given."

How could the United States, with its dynamism, brilliance and productivity, possibly be the beast of the apocalypse, an image usually linked with genocidal monsters like STALIN and HITLER? The problem is not America's strengths but its weaknesses, the unseen shadow cast by its positive self-image.

The identification of the United States as the 666 suggests that U.S. dominance poses

particular dangers to the world. Despite the United States' good faith and good deeds, the historical truth is that America exemplifies a heedless materialism which is deeply selfish and exploitative and which cannot be sustained.

To understand the dangers presented by U.S. values, it is essential to look at the United States in the historical perspective of the *imperial* tradition. The United States stands at the historical culmination of the legal, administrative and military systems developed by the Roman Empire which were responsible in coordination with local authorities for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

There is continuity between the hostility to the divine among the powers dominating the West in Biblical times and the present. In Paul's words in Romans 1,25, both worship the creature rather than the Creator.

To the extent the United States continues the imperial tradition, the theory of her as the 666 can be viewed as a warning sign from God and the ultimate message of the incarnation of Christ, indicating where humanity would stray from the path of our own long-term welfare.

## Implications for Theology

If the United States really is the 666, the Revelation contains the central major truth of the culmination of human history. Such a suggestion jars against the secular trend of the physical sciences.

For the 666 to be an actual prediction about the United States, its appearance in the Bible, a book written 2000 years ago, and its retention in the canon by the Church despite its implausibility, goes beyond anything science can yet understand.

In light of this mysterious dimension, the whole topic needs to be approached with some respect for the possibility that a truth beyond our understanding is at work. Remembering the story of Jonah, the journey into this interpretation should be joined, not with alarm, but with the expectation that God is at work to overturn our preconceptions and secure our salvation.

At the very least, it is an extraordinary and uncanny coincidence that the U.S. dollar and former President REAGAN so accurately fulfill the Biblical prophecy of a time when the name of the ruler of the world and his currency would have the number 666.

The fact that the United States so neatly fits the central features of the Biblical prophecy is enough by itself to justify a critical examination of the suggestion that she is the 666, with a view to finding an elegant and coherent basis for a new scientific approach to Christian theology.

Such a claim deserves to be approached with some scepticism, considering that people throughout the ages have imagined they saw the beast in their own time. While remaining mindful of this legitimate doubt, I believe the logic inherent in the argument is compelling and that it provides the key to resolving twenty centuries of uncertainty about the status of Jesus as Messiah and the truth of the Christian message.

Previous interpretations of the 666, such as the associations drawn with NERO, some of the Popes, or HITLER, have relied on metaphor and obscure mathematical claims to make the facts fit the prophecy.

Here no such effort is required because the correlations with the dollar and REAGAN

are exact and simple. Setting out the alternate associations shows the contrast with earlier forced interpretations.

For example, the teaching that 666 applies to NERO takes a relatively uncommon form of NERO's name, NERO Cæsar and adds an "n", resulting in NERON Cæsar. Next the Latin is transliterated into Aramaic, resulting in *nrwn qsr*, which when using the numeric equivalent of the letters, then adds up to 666. Similarly farfetched is the claim that letters supposedly inscribed in a papal miter are 'VICARIUS FILII DEI', which add to 666 by similar mathematical contortion.

The problem, unlike these earlier efforts to demonise an opponent, might rather be to ask whether the beast really is the absolute evil of traditional imagery. Perhaps instead it is more like a stumbling blind giant which lacks the capacity, despite its good will, to secure its future from its own resources, and needs external help to put it on the right path.

The implications of the claim that the United States is the beast should be treated with caution, given the momentous nature of what is being said, and its potential to test our political structures and the meaning of Christian faith.

For my part, as an admirer of U.S. achievements, the need for caution and surety has led me to consider the issues privately since REAGAN was in power. I believe the arguments presented here demonstrate that the United States is indeed predicted in the Biblical prophecy, but the implications for the future are by no means so clear.

For example, it does not inevitably mean the United States will degenerate along the lines of traditional images of the beast into an evil force bent on death and destruction. The correlation with the 666 does not imply the United States as a whole is essentially evil, or that a cosmic divine wrath is in store for the human race, or, least of all, that the capitalist system should be overthrown.

Considering that God's love is the main teaching of the Bible, it is more likely that the truth of the 666 should foreshadow, not apocalyptic collapse, but the possibility of divine forgiveness and transformation.

As we move into an era where America is the sole superpower and the Earth is groaning under the weight of humanity, modern society has cut itself off, to a large extent, from God and from nature.

This failure to provide any ground for our being means we lack a systematic understanding of the place of humanity in the universe, integrating the scientific worldview and the spiritual needs of humanity.

The identification of the United States as the 666, within an otherwise generally sceptical framework, is advanced here as a cogent foundation for such a rational understanding of our place, giving grounds to see the Bible as a source of elemental wisdom about the moral structure of the world, and as the channel for the eternal God for Whom all times are equally present.

## Christ as Cosmic Visionary

Jesus Christ called all people to a life of love, truth, justice and faith. He summed up these values in the teachings to love God and to treat others as we would have them treat us. In the dangerous and unstable times we now live in, a return to these teachings

of Jesus Christ would help humanity to live together peacefully in a sustainable global community.

A major problem, however, is that essential Christian ethics, such as simplicity, humility and generosity, are largely foreign to the corporate and military mind supported by the U.S. economy.

The miraculous stories of the Bible point to a remarkable connection between the historical person Jesus and an eternal truth about the place of humanity in the universe. The power of this connection to the eternal is the essence of the holiness of Jesus Christ and the source of the miraculous energy attested by the Gospels.

Perhaps the crowning miracle of this eternal vision is the truth of the 666, which of course is presented as the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1,2). The 666 could be the divine revelation, providing the essential point of contact between human spirituality and our universe, bringing our human systems to account before God.

Now that technology has outstripped our social evolution, creating nuclear, greenhouse and other dangers to our future, we should be open to the possibility that God provided a message that would enable us to stop and consider our path, so our social and political capacity could catch up with our scientific and economic abilities.

The only way such a social vision could penetrate our congealed power systems would be for humanity to be given a divine revelation of the structure of history. The promise of the Bible is that the divine nature will be revealed to us, that God will provide us with the key to enable a connection between humanity and eternal truth.

The suggestion here, that the Bible offers such a key by predicting U.S. dominance, implies that God has intervened prophetically in human history through Jesus Christ and the Bible for our salvation.

## Humanity and Truth

The murder of Jesus Christ shows, more than any other event in history, the gulf between humanity and truth. The cross is a symbol of how Jesus Christ, the person who most fully embodied divine truth, was too much for his society to handle, because they preferred their illusions to the harsh honesty of self-recognition. Such denial of the universal and eternal values of God should lead to destruction, but the promise of resurrection is that God will intervene to save us.

The blood of the cross may yet prove redemptive, but only through the understanding it gives of the human situation, through the knowledge that the personal and structural sins of our world are caused by denial of truth and failure to love.

Jesus Christ was given up to be killed by the Roman State America is the modern heir of Roman imperialism. The emblematic instrument of Western rule, the United States dollar, is the new cross, the power which supporters of love and truth must transform. The message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the evil of imperialism will be conquered by the truth of God, when the meek, the peacemakers and the poor in spirit will inherit the Earth.

This essay has discussed the correspondence of the 666 with REAGAN and the dollar, the continuity between the United States' world position and that of the empire which

crucified Jesus Christ, and the extent to which our time shows the signs of transition between ages.

In light of these factors, if the prophecy of the United States as 666 is true, we have an intellectually coherent and elegant basis for Christianity as the foundation for reform and evolution of human society.

By prompting a return to a humble honesty before God, before the Earth and before each other, this message can enable a renewing openness to central themes in our civilization, such as truth, justice and reconciliation, and can provide the foundation for humanity to move into a truly global order.

The notion of the United States as 666 could therefore be the key to a new interpretation of world history and a first premise for a new systematic Christian theology. Naming the United States as 666 could be the essential first step to forestall the main threats to human existence, and an essential basis for peaceful evolution of human life on Earth, within a stable political framework, away from unsustainable practices and towards an ethical world community.

No single nation-state should lead the process of globalization, which requires a new level of humility and cooperation before God. The question of what should follow the current period of U.S. dominance is of course the big issue raised by this argument.

My view is that a steady consultative increase in the integration between national systems, through new world institutions, is inevitable and to be welcomed. It may even be that these institutions must be wrested away from their old world locations, and re-founded in neutral places to emphasize the need for all to be treated with justice.

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs

# Common Witness as a Foretaste of the *Basileia*

*The idea of the common witness of Christians as a missiological phenomenon became so popular in the ecumenical vocabulary that it is possible in recent literature to underline, instead of speaking about dialogue and mission, the dialectical and complementary shapes rather of dialogue and witness<sup>1</sup>.*

*There are five important documents which constitute the basis of our approach to the topic in the scenario of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), some of them through their common body, the Joint Working Group (JWG). These are dated from 1961 till the most recent one, in 1997.*

*We examine the terms and definitions which surround this paradigm, especially religious freedom, Christian witness, common witness and proselytism. The theme is first grasped from the other side, that of counter-witness, corrupted witness, proselytism. We experience proselytism in rivalry, false offerings, linguistics, political power and exclusive thinking.*

*There are points that are very much debated and still not decided among the denominations engaging in mission: (Church and secular) history, doctrine and ecclesiology. In our future cooperation we are predestined to work together in the service for the world, in the protection of human rights and social justice.*

*The common study of the Bible, the word of God, the deeply engaged theological dialogue, the proper religious education and formation of all Christians, and—most importantly—the praying together and for each other can and should be essential tools and means as well.*

*Considering these, the concept, theory and practice of our common Christian witness are generally understood as the ruling new paradigm of mission in the XXI<sup>st</sup> century, in living out the Reign of God together.<sup>2</sup>*

1 FITZGERALD Michael L. MAFR, *Witness and Dialogue* follows the history of this complementary pair: International Review of Mission LXXXVI/340. 1997/1–2. 113–117.

2 BOSCH David J., *Mission as Common Witness* formulates the seven characteristics of this new paradigm: In BOSCH David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. New York, 1991. 457–467. There is also a reader's companion to this important book: PACHUAU Lalsangkima, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*. Norman E. Thomas (ed.): *A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission (1995)*. International Review of Mission LXXXV/336. 1996/1. 121–122.



## I. From *Christian* to *Common Witness*

There are five documents dealing with the very question of witness (Christian or common) in the history of the ecumenical movement at the highest level. The first one is *Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty* (CWPR, 1961)<sup>3</sup>. Its conception and birth was required first by the WCC Evanston Assembly in 1954.<sup>4</sup>

A decade later the RCC joined the ecumenical movement, and a JWG was established in 1965. One of their first documents is the *Common Witness and Proselytism* (CWP, 1970)<sup>5</sup>.

Their second joint statement on this topic is the most elaborated and wide-embracing among all: *Common Witness* (CW, 1982).<sup>6</sup> It has an appendix with certain important and significant case studies and personal and communal testimonies.

The most recent study guide of the JWG, which was written after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening up of the Central and Eastern European countries, is *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness* (CPCCW, 1996).<sup>7</sup>

The most contemporary of all of these statements is a WCC document, *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism* (TCW, 1997),<sup>8</sup> which is recommended to the churches by the WCC Central Committee.

Preceding this call, four meetings were held to formulate and elaborate the text itself and its content.<sup>9</sup> The first was called *Towards Responsible Relationships in Mission: Some Reflections on Common Witness, Proselytism and New Forms of Sharing*, in Chambésy, Switzerland in 1993.<sup>10</sup>

The second one was intended especially to shape the Orthodox input on the theme, under the name *Mission and Proselytism*, held in Moscow, Russia, in the year 1995. It was followed by a conference in Manila in 1995, having the title *Called to Common Witness*.

Finally, in 1996, the WCC Bossey Ecumenical Institute held a meeting and conference to redraft and rewrite this message: *Towards Common Witness: a Call to Adopt Responsible Relations in Mission and to Avoid Proselytism*.

When we speak about common witness as a fundamental missiological paradigm, we should especially consider four basic terms which surround our topic. The concept of

3 Revised Report on "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches" can be found in the final report of the Assembly: In FRY Franklin Clark (ed.), *Evanston to New Delhi (1954–1961): Report of the Central Committee to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1961. 239–245.

4 The first version ever on this topic: *Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches: A Provisional Report Submitted to the Member Churches for their Consideration*. The Ecumenical Review 1956/4. 48–56.

5 *Common Witness and Proselytism: A Study Document*. Published for example in the official forum of the World Council of Churches: The Ecumenical Review 1971/1. 9–20.

6 *Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1980.; and The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity–Information Service. 1980/3–4. 142–162.

7 *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group*. The Ecumenical Review 1996/2. 212–221.

8 *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism*. Genève, 1997.

9 COONEY Monica SMSM, *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Avoid Proselytism* lists all four of these conferences and meetings: International Review of Mission LXXXV/337. 1996/2. 283–289.

10 Their insights can be read in the elaborated report, *Towards Responsible Relations in Mission: Some Reflections on Common Witness, Proselytism and New Forms of Sharing*. International Review of Mission LXXXII/326. 1993/2. 235–239.

*religious freedom* places the question in the communal context of world religions and Christian denominations and on the other hand in the personal context of free will and human individuality and personality.

The *responsibility of Christian witness* is a fundamental moral and ethical element of being authentically Christian. The *ecumenical way of witnessing* is this common one, of which we quote a definition here.

Finally, we have a look at the counter-phenomenon to witnessing, which is the betrayal of the whole movement towards visible Church unity: the phenomenon of *proselytism*, including the different kinds of proselytic actions.

The term which by now replaced Christian witness in the vocabulary of the ecumenical movement is *common witness*, a phrase which stresses the fact that separate witness to the truth is a counter-witness by itself.

## 1. Religious Freedom for All

In its definition of religious freedom, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR, 1948) was influenced by contemporary theological views, schools and movements, and it also had a great impact on the later development of Christian self-understandings, for example on the RCC Second Vatican Council.<sup>11</sup>

The paragraph is a beautifully elaborated one, and goes as follows: “Everyone has the right to *freedom of thought, conscience and religion*. This right includes the freedom to *change* the religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private, to *manifest* this religion or belief, in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

When the *CWP* (1970) mentions this whole definition, it does not miss adding a very important phrase to the last sentence: everyone has the right to manifest religion also “*in social action*.” This addition signals the explicit turnover of our theological way of thinking towards the social (and sometimes political and sociological) issues as well, since they should be—and step by step they are indeed—on the agenda of every religion, according to our present understanding.

Every right, however, has a counterpart, which should be usually a moral and ethical duty and *responsibility*. The RCC Second Vatican Council has explicitly formulated this responsibility, when it dealt with human dignity in *Dignitatis Humanæ: Declaration on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (1965).<sup>12</sup> The other side of religious freedom in this setting is our common human responsibility to seek and search for the truth ceaselessly, especially because we have reason, we have conscience and moreover we have free will.

The WCC's *Nairobi Statement* from 1975 completes this picture, adding that we also have our human responsibility to serve the whole community that we are members of and that we belong to either by blood, history, culture, or decision.

11 LITTELL Franklin H. examines this very important impact in quite a few sentences in his brilliant article: *A Response to the Decree on Religious Freedom*. In ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 697–700.

12 *Dignitatis Humanæ on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (1965). It can be found for example in ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 675–696. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanæ\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanæ_en.html).

## 2. Christian Witness to the Kingdom

Witnessing, ie. *martyria* (martyrdom) is an integral part of the nature of Christianity. Of course, the unique and decisive witness of God, the true and faithful witness in a proper sense is Jesus Christ Himself (Rev. 3,14), the source of all of our witness.<sup>13</sup>

Our (partial) witness (or participation in witnessing), on the other hand, includes, as the *CWPRL* (1961) document puts it, the act of persuading persons to accept the supreme authority of Jesus Christ, committing themselves to Him, and rendering Him loving service in the fellowship of His Church. This language, which was influenced by the missionary approach of the *International Missionary Council* (IMC), which had just joined the WCC in the same year at the WCC New Delhi Assembly (1961), changed in the next document, partly because of the entrance of the RCC into the ecumenical movement.

In *CWP* (1970), the definition of Christian witness is the act of proclaiming God's acts in history and seeking to reveal Jesus Christ as the true light, which shines for every human in their whole life and in the whole world. The statement discerns three fields where this genuine and authentic witness can and should take place: in the worship of God, in the responsible service of others and in the proclamation of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The last official paper that defines this term is the *CW* (1982), which is the most humble in the understanding of our part in this process. According to this document, Christian witness is charity, love and humility by our own being. It possesses especially two important characteristics: it always seeks a response from the others, and it is ready even for martyrdom (witnessing *by blood*, facing even death). The response which arrives from the others is enriching also for the persons witnessing, and makes them constantly rethink their relationship with the witnessed reality.

## 3. Common Witness: The Future Way

We are going to build on the definition now given by the *CWP* (1970) document, which understands common witness as the all-embracing sum of all joint efforts aiming to manifest the divine gifts of truth and life we Christians already share in common.

The two basic theological reasons given there are that Christians are already one by virtue of their baptism; and that Mystery, Word and Spirit are witnessing to one another, in a Trinitarian, *perichoretic* (mutually interpenetrative) way, where we are called to participate in.<sup>14</sup>

There can be a third explanation as well: that Christianity has a chance in the new territories to make a new start, maybe forgetting the schisms and sins of the past against our visible and manifest unity.<sup>15</sup>

The freshness and dynamism of the younger churches gives a new hope and impetus

13 BRIA Ion, *Witness* starts with this fundamental statement: In LOSSKY Nicholas – BONINO José Míguez – POBEE John S. – STRANSKY Tom F. – WAINWRIGHT Geoffrey – WEBB Pauline (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Genève, 1991. 1067–1069.

14 BEVANS Stephen B. SVD, *Common Witness* collects the reasons, apart from the two basic ecumenical ones, for common witness: In MÜLLER Karl SVD – SUNDERMEIER Theo – BEVANS Stephen B. SVD – BLIESE Richard H. (eds.), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*. New York, 1997. 72–73.

15 The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity gives this rarely used insight in *The 1993 Directory for Ecumenism*. Origins 1993/9. 130–160.

for the creative manifestation of our already given but not yet fully realised unity and oneness as the only Church of Jesus Christ.

One can easily notice and see that common witness is a much broader concept than just being in cooperation with each other or just our joint efforts together. It is broader, since it needs the acknowledgement, respect and appreciation of the shared gifts of grace, truth and love in our denominations and also the frank rejoicing and joy in their exercise.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Proselytism throughout the Ages

The term that has changed its meaning the most, almost from one point to a totally contrary one, is the distasteful term *proselytism*. In Biblical times (from the Greek phrase: *who comes towards*) it basically meant a person who became a member of the Jewish community by believing in YHWH and respecting the Law of Moses.

The word itself occurs only four times in the *New Testament*, once in Matthew and thrice in the Acts of the Apostles. Among others, proselytes were present at the event of Pentecost, according to Acts 2,10. In Matthew 23,15 Jesus condemns the Pharisees, and when enlisting their sins, he mentions one that they cross sea and land to make a single proselyte, but then they make this new convert twice as much a child of hell as themselves.

When the Apostles selected seven persons of good standing in Acts 6,5, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom they appointed to the task of waiting on tables, by laying their hands on them, one of them was Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. Finally, Acts 13,43 mentions that many Jews and also many devout proselytes followed the apostles Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue their life in the grace of God.

The *Early Church* continued to use the term, but gave it another meaning, parallel with the extension of the phrase *people of God* from Jews (the people and nation of Israel) to Christians. In those times, proselytism started to mean a person of another faith who converted to Christianity by changing religion.

Some centuries later in the ecumenical movement it got a very different meaning, close to *sheep stealing*.<sup>17</sup> In contemporary vocabulary we are not speaking about individuals marked by the name proselyte, but rather processes of churches, denoting their activity, with the suffix *-ism*.

The *CWPRL* (1961) document defines proselytism as the corruption of witness specifically in purpose, motive and spirit. This is quite a broad definition, embracing all kinds of false witnesses.

The meaning of the term is slightly narrowed by the *CWP* (1970) document. It circumscribes the word as a conglomerate of different kinds of improper attitudes and behaviours which fundamentally violate the right of the human person (either Christian or non-Christian), to be free from external coercion in different religious

16 The rejoicing and joy is stressed in STRANSKY Tom, *Common Witness*. In LOSSKY Nicholas – BONINO José Míguez – POBEE John S. – STRANSKY Tom F. – WAINWRIGHT Geoffrey – WEBB Pauline (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Genève, 1991. 197–200.

17 The term is used in HORNER Norman A., *The Problem of Intra-Christian Proselytism*. *International Review of Mission* LXX/280. 1981/3. 304–313.

matters. It is obvious that in this stage proselytism is understood as the opposite of religious freedom. Especially remarkable is the fact that it contains non-Christians (using the contemporary term *people of other living faiths*) as well. Of course, it does not exclude, forbid or even discourage mission as such, but calls forth our responsibility to conduct it in a fair and honest manner, free of coercion on others.

The CW (1982) document keeps and repeats this meaning, with some alterations: proselytism violates the right to be free not just from mainly external coercion, but from moral restraint as well as from psychical and psychological pressure.

The first document to sharpen the term for Christians is the CPCCW (1996), stating that proselytism is the collective noun for all conscious efforts of Christians with the intention to win adherents from other Christian communities. This is also the first place to use the word conversely to common witness.

The most elaborate and accurate definition of it is to be found in the document TCW (1997). It uses the word to denote the encouragement of Christians to change their denominational allegiance, through certain ways and means that strongly contradict the spirit of Christian love and charity, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the Church of Jesus Christ.

In this broader sense proselytism is in fundamental opposition to ecumenism, to the ecumenical movement and thinking, to religious freedom and liberty, and also to our common and therefore Christian witness.

## II. Credibility and Counter-Witness

The main problem with the phenomenon of proselytism is that it *scandalizes* the fellow churches and the world, and so it provides a counter-witness to the truths and depths of the Christian idea of living and believing. Now we shall take a look at the ways churches (who are sisters to each other) show bad examples by their efforts at gaining new members through fierce competition against each other, by offering advantages to the recent converts, using unmerited language, too strong ties with the state and the political powers and principalities, or a superior and exclusive way of thinking about ourselves and others.

Apart from the obvious and scandalous counter-witness in many parts of the Globe, there are some debated issues of theology which are unsolved as yet, but which are in a process of understanding and convergence among us. Examples are our approach to Church history; the doctrines and dogmas of different traditions, especially concerning sacraments (baptism and marriage); and the ecclesiological question (issues concerning the Church), which seem to embrace all the other aspects and theories.

### 1. History and Rivalry

We all have different historical experiences, and our understandings and interpretations of past events vary, or sometimes totally contradict each other. The historical arguments coming from *wounded memories* are poisoning our relationships. Sometimes children are blamed for the sins and faults that their parents committed a long time ago.

Most of the denominations refuse the Early Church concept of the *canonical territory*

of a certain local church. A special case here is the one of the Eastern Rite Catholics, whom some call a treasure, some a scandal, but in each case their very existence seems to be an obstacle towards unity.

Since the missionary activities of the XIX<sup>th</sup> and XX<sup>th</sup> centuries led to parallel ecclesiastical structures in the so-called *mission fields* of the younger churches, the Atlantic culture managed to export its historical divisions to other continents. Sometimes the enmities in these newly reached territories are even more fervent, fierce and tragic than in the countries and regions of the world where the separations happened so many years ago.

The ministry of reconciliation is given to the churches as an obligation and also as an opportunity. The means of that could be sharing information and accountability to each other; prior discussion with the church which already exists on a certain (canonical) territory before engaging into any kinds and sorts of mission and evangelisation work; or the continuous collaboration and cooperation while doing mission.

The ecumenical solution is to strictly renounce this denominational competition and rivalry<sup>18</sup> of committed Christians in these territories, with a special focus on avoiding the establishment of parallel ecclesial structures. The final solution would be, of course, to form and maintain responsible relationships with each other in every aspect.

## 2. State and Politics

Sometimes close connections to the state in unhealthy ways cause problems in intra-Christian relationships. The political powers, principalities, and the ruling government can provide a helping hand to the oppression and harassment of minorities, or can help to put pressure on them.<sup>19</sup>

In some parts of the world the Christian churches coming from richer and wealthier countries might misuse *humanitarian aid* for the purpose of gaining new members for their religious communities. Also, when poorer people arrive to some wealthier territories, and they are immigrants and usually marginalized there, certain benefits are offered to change their denominational allegiance, and in that way to exploit these people's needs.

What we can do is to firmly condemn and disclaim any kinds of manipulations of and with humanitarian assistance in its every form, and dedicate ourselves to helping immigrants in their struggles regardless of their denomination.

The separation of state and Church is basically the fruit of the French Revolution, but nevertheless a fruitful means of living together and possessing the freedom of conscience, religious freedom and liberty, especially when this separation does not mean enmity, but can entail also cooperation in common concerns as required.<sup>20</sup>

18 SAUCA Ioan, *Towards a Fresh Affirmation of the Ecumenical Commitment to Mission in Unity*. International Review of Mission LXXXVI/343. 1997/4. 383–388.

19 MEJÍA Jorge sees rightly its importance in *Non-Catholic Missions in Catholic Countries?* In KÜNG Hans (ed.), *Do we Know the Others?* Concilium 1966/14. 104–110.

20 MURRAY John Courtney SI does not hesitate to agree with it in *Religious Freedom*. In ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 672–674.

### 3. Language and Doctrine

Many times one can find unjust and uncharitable references to other fellow churches and towards their members in the language of some Christians, including unfair and even malevolent criticism. It can happen for instance by caricaturing the others concerning their use of arts in church buildings and other religious places, their practice of devotion towards icons, their veneration of Mary, the Holy Virgin and the other saints, or their prayers for the dead.

One can see that this way of proselytism is directed from the less liturgical churches to the more ritualistic ones. It is extremely common in these cases that people are unevenly comparing their ideals against the practices of the other communities. In some other cases there is suspicion or even the lack of respect for the culture and civilization of the partner.

Behind the question of proselytism and mission, real ecumenical problems lie, such as the content of our faith, the limits of legitimate diversity inside unity, and the goals and aims of mission and evangelisation.

The most acutely aching problem is rebaptism, since baptism is considered to be the only ecumenical *sacrament* so far, and thus a value and treasure to be protected by all Christians and Christian churches. Among the acute questions in this respect there is also marriage, and the necessity of the parents' consent in case of a child's or any youngster's conversion.

The shift from malevolent criticism to self-criticism and self-examination of conscience, to repentance and genuine inner renewal could be fruitful as well. We can offer what the Apostle Paul advised to us in his letters: let us speak the truth in love as fellow baptized members of the same Church.

What is a basic topic for our common future is the issue of education and formation inside our churches to mutual sensitivity and understanding and reciprocal trust. Only in this friendly and even sisterly and brotherly atmosphere can we really listen to each other in genuine encounter and dialogue, which leads us to an as-yet unknown future.<sup>21</sup>

### 5. Exclusivism and Ecclesiology

The Christian denominations differ also in the notion of Church membership: how to become a member, how to determine the length of it, and what our duties and responsibilities are when being a church member. Concerning the commitment of members of other denominations, a value judgement is common among us. To mention just a few: *nominal* member, *true* member, and *born-again* member.

It is also not obvious at all who can be rightly called "*unchurched*", and along with this logic, who really needs a re-evangelisation. Some denominations are engaged in and committed to Church growth and expansion in terms of mere numbers.<sup>22</sup>

Frequently among new religious movements and *sects*, exclusivism and sectarianism

21 ARNOLD John – MARTINI Carlo Maria uses this poetic expression in 'At Thy Word': *Mission and evangelisation in Europe Today. Report on the Fifth Ecumenical Encounter, Santiago de Compostela, 13–17 Nov 1991*. Catholic International 1992/2. 88–93.

22 NEWBIGIN Lesslie cannot but sadly state this in *Common Witness and Unity*. International Review of Mission LXIX/274. 1980/2. 158–160.

is very popular, culminating in fundamentalist and intolerant stances. Claims such as “the only true Church,” “the only right faith,” “the one and only way to salvation,” cause aching tensions among the people of God.

Although there are historical churches which have such and similar claims, they differ in a certain and important way that they recognize the (sacramental) possibilities of salvation in other churches and ecclesial communities as well.

This is the decisive point which can help us to differ between exclusivism and such historical claims coming from a certain ecclesiology. An eager willingness to learn from each other and to be open to the other’s gifts and the surprises of the Holy Spirit seems to be a proper and to-be-followed attitude towards the separated churches.

Our ecumenical obligation is openness and concern to discern worthy and unworthy motives in the hearts and souls of the new converts, and to consult each other when it comes to the shift of one’s denominational allegiance. Real fellowship is the very beginning and the final goal of witness in general.<sup>23</sup>

### III. Vision of a Participatory *Basileia*

We examine here six areas enlisted in the aforementioned documents, where the possibility of ecumenical cooperation and genuine common witness are already given realities. Among these fields there are *koinonia*, *diakonia* and service, the territories of human rights and social justice; the translation and study of the Bible, the word of God; deep and open theological dialogue among each other; common (or at least shared) religious education and evangelisation; and common prayer and intercession for each other.

The two main golden rules for our acting together should be as follows: Let us do all things and deeds together except where the fidelity to our conscience would forbid it. And secondly, any situation where contact and cooperation between different Christian denominations are refused must be regarded by all as abnormal.

#### 1. Service, Human Rights and Social Justice

*Diakonia* and service basically mean the same thing in the community: to help all of our neighbours in their human needs<sup>24</sup>, in community. This is one thing that we could easily make in common, and we also should do it, in order to multiply our capacities by this reciprocal support.

Of course, there are a lot of areas and fields where we can work together in the society. A good organizational and institutional example can and should be *Inter-Church Aid*, where one church supports and helps the other one, which is from another denomination.

In the field of human rights and social justice the denominations are able to witness together, to maintain and to show to the world the wide variety of spiritual, ethical and moral values which they share in common.<sup>25</sup> The ecclesial communities should also

23 DURRWELL Frank is right to say this in *Christian Witness: A Theological Study*. International Review of Mission LXIX/274. 1980/2. 121–134.

24 MAURY Philippe’s opinion comes from the students’ experience: *Witnessing in the University Communities*. The Student World 1953/2. 120–130.

25 MOORE Richard, *Witness: Jesus Christ’s Mandate to the Church. Response to Bishop Mortimer Arias*. International Review

work hand in hand for the respect of human dignity in all parts of the world, for peace in the weekdays and in the hearts and souls of the people.

These joint efforts are remarkably needed in the cases of natural disasters, hunger and different kinds of human suffering in the world. The Christian denominations are capable and also responsible to unite their forces for the development of all of humanity.

## 2. Dialogue, Education and Evangelisation

Much can be said about the unquestionable eagerness and need for a deep and seeking theological dialogue, as a foundation and source of our Christian common witness, and as the speaking of truth in love.

“The truth that leads to life is found only in *dialogue* and communion,”<sup>26</sup> says Maria Teresa Porcile SANTISO. Because of its basic and elementary importance, we mention here the common research of the Holy Scripture, and the different publications and statements on still divisive issues.

The word of God, the Bible, should be treated as our common Christian ground on which we can grow together in sharing community and visible unity. One means of this growing is the common ecumenical translation of the Bible (including, of course, the deuterocanonical books or apocrypha, at least in the appendix).

Another means are the reading together of the Holy Book, the Sacred Scriptures, common Bible studies, pulpit exchange, common schoolbooks for Biblical studies; and there are many other ways of studying the Bible, being pilgrims in a road where our own ecumenicity requires us to do all these.<sup>27</sup>

We have already mentioned the strong importance of common religious education and common Christian evangelisation. One kind of organ among the many to fulfil this task of ours is the system of national and regional (and the world) councils of churches.

There the genuine and deep listening to each other and also the thankful and grateful receiving from the others as well as the “bringing together the fruits of the discussions and debates”<sup>28</sup> can genuinely take place.

## 3. Prayer for and with the Others

So far we followed the glorious road of the term *common witness* in the ecumenical age of mission and evangelism. We were not silent about the wrong, bad and dangerous side of this missiological phenomenon, proselytism. We examined the misuse of our common vocation to witness Jesus Christ to the world. We kept in mind the still undecided or unclear questions as well, which need further elaboration, study and investigation.

In the dimension of spiritual ecumenism, the celebration of our interrelatedness,

of Mission LXV/257. 1976/1. 34–36.

26 Poetic expression by SAUCA Ioan, *One Gospel – Diverse Expressions*. International Review of Mission LXXXV/337. 1996/2. 253–256.

27 SANTISO Maria Teresa Porcile, *Common Bible Work: A Living Parable of Common Witness*. International Review of Mission LXX/279. 1981/2. 174–176.

28 YUNG Hwa, *David J. Bosch: Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. International Review of Mission LXXXI/322. 1992/2. 319–324.

Another important review of this book: KIM Kirsteen, *Post-Modern Mission: A Paradigm Shift in David Bosch's Theology of Mission?* International Review of Mission LXXXIX/353. 2000/2. 172–179.

like the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (and also the Universal Day of Prayer for Students), liturgy is essential and cannot be omitted. This can be exercised by certain charismatic communities, by different monastic orders, also by religious fellowships and ecumenical groups (such as the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, or the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute in Pannonhalma, Hungary), or even by the smallest (sometimes-ecumenical) unit of the Church, the marriage or *ecclesiola* (small church).

The further elaboration of our common notion on the truth (the area of scientific epistemology) and our common notion on the Church (the very field of ecclesiology) and the united (but naturally still very much diversified) understanding of the mission of the Church as *Missio Dei*, are tasks which remain for the future.

In solidarity with and interceding for each other we can strengthen our ties; a process which should and will conclude in the final and eschatological common witness: the all-embracing sharing of the supreme sacrament of ours, the Holy Eucharist. In our prosperous future, a lot of common hopes and expectations can finally find their fulfilment, with the help of God, in God's *Basileia*. Ahead of common witness, there is still an important role to play until its blossoming: the common witness of an already visibly united Church.

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John George HUBER

# What is the Ultimate Ecumenical Challenge on the Bumpy Road to Christian Unity?

*My ventures in interchurch journalism are a way of “carrying the ecumenical torch” from the global level to the local koinonia of Jesus Christ’s followers. While identifying what I believe to be the ultimate ecumenical challenge, namely, church-dividing ecclesiological issues, I rejoice in the many significant agreements that have been reached across confessional lines to advance the cause of that unity for which our Lord prayed (John 17). May this example of spiritual ecumenism inspire us to go and do likewise with passion and perseverance.*

## Where a Missouri Synod Ecumenist Became the Village Elder

I have always been urging others to pursue lifelong learning. Then, as if to “put my money where my mouth is,” I invested in a two-semester Master of Ecumenical Studies program near Geneva, Switzerland, at the age of seventy.

Bossey, the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches (WCC), each term attracts around fifty seminarians, younger pastors and lay people from every continent, who represent a wide range of cultures and Christian traditions.

Among them are about a dozen Master students who take additional seminars and then translate their more focused theological research into a major hundred-page dissertation that must be defended before a jury of professors from three faculties, including a representative from the University of Geneva, the institution that accredits the academic program.

In a plenary session during the opening week, a student voiced concern over an interpersonal conflict that was brewing within our community, which she said could cause an explosion.

Another student suggested that someone in our midst is a person with much experience, and could mediate the dispute. I thanked him for this vote of confidence, but pointed to the vicar of Bossey, an ordained Evangelical-Lutheran pastor, as a more viable resource.

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The director of the Ecumenical Institute then noted: “So we have a choice between the vicar and the *village elder!*” The name stuck during all ten months of my stay, and I regarded it as a badge of honor.

The Bossey program has an academic focus that involves listening to lectures, giving reports on assigned readings, making oral presentations at seminars, engaging in small-group discussions and writing papers

So, doing research in the library was a frequent haunt that also provided access to documents on the Internet, as well as a daily opportunity to keep in email contact with distant loved ones at home.

The Institute is regarded as an *ecumenical laboratory* that includes an experimental and experiential dimension of dreaming ecumenical dreams together, dining with one another and worshipping.

There was also singing, planning, arguing, playing, hiking the nearby Jura mountains, sharing some food and demonstrating the customs of our culture, laughing, dancing, and sometimes grieving together.

Guiding us through this ecumenical journey were gifted professors for whom English is not their native tongue, each representing a different confessional and national context. At my time, one was a Romanian Orthodox priest from Romania.

Another was a Congregational pastor and Rugby coach from Samoa. Another hailed from Tanzania and was a priest appointed to Bossey by the Vatican. A fourth professor was a Methodist from Uruguay.

Let me be more specific about my ecumenical discoveries. Through the process of writing my paper, an overarching impression was that the many bilateral and multilateral dialogues between and among the separated denominations have produced many agreements.

These include topics like baptism, the Eucharistic presence of Christ, Scripture and Tradition, Mary and the saints, the centrality of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, and some aspects of the papacy, among others.

All these topics and aspects indicate the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, most of these ecumenical achievements and results are not known by lay people and even pastors in the local parish.

Therefore, I have decided to tell this ecumenical story to all who are interested and will listen to it, in order to share the results of four interconfessional initiatives that are documented in my paper.

These are the following: (1) the nine U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogues that began in 1965 and are now entering Round 11; (2) the agreements on the Eucharist and the ecumenical goal facilitated by the Faith and Order (F&O) Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC); (3) the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), resulting from years of international conversations between the Vatican and churches belonging to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF); and (4) the full communion agreements between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and five other churches, with a sixth entering this process later.

All of these positive impressions of the quest for visible Christian unity are matched by a new realization of the remaining ecclesiological challenges of the historic episcopate and papal primacy, as well as ongoing disagreements over ethical questions.

## Feasting on an Ecumenical Smorgasbord

The annual National Workshop on Christian Unity that was held in San Jose, California, in May 2006, had a rich variety of worship experiences, personal contacts, lectures, seminars and luncheon gatherings. The bottom line is that this ecumenical smorgasbord was a truly delectable feast.

While the emphasis at the workshop is to relate to one another ecumenically, the various denominational groupings also hold their own separate caucuses to deal with in-house issues that bear upon our common quest for Christian unity.

*Worshipping together* is a vital venture in spiritual ecumenism. During the processional of the opening liturgy, we all sang "In Christ there is no East or West." Liturgical dance was also a grace moment, and the choral group was outstanding.

In the homily we heard that nobody and no denomination has the whole truth. The only way that we can get the truth is to come together. We must strive to be in full communion with one another.

Each day began with a morning prayer. On one occasion there was a service that featured Taizé chants. An Episcopal-Lutheran Eucharist was celebrated one evening, followed by a reception.

Another memorable Eucharistic service was sponsored by the nine mainline Protestant "COCU" denominations that, since 2002, have affirmed a covenanted relationship known as Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC).

Their greatest challenge is to recognize and reconcile one another's ministries. A special committee is engaged in dialogue and study, with the determination to present the final draft of a document for a vote on this issue by the member communions.

The homilist urged a new approach to unity by offering the acronym "COYOTE," which stands for "Call Off Your Old-Time Ecumenism." In an effort to become more ecumenically inclusive, the National Workshop invited two prominent "conservative evangelicals" to make presentations.

Richard J. MOUW, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, was the keynote speaker. He identified four characteristics of the evangelicals: (1) advocating conversion to Jesus Christ and a personal relationship with him; (2) accepting the supreme authority of the Bible; (3) the centrality of the cross; and (4) an activism that is engaged in evangelism and working for justice and peace. Evangelicals resist conciliar ecumenism. They are more committed to parachurch networks like Promise Keepers.

The closing lecture of the Workshop featured another evangelical, Kevin MANNOIA, chaplain of Azusa Pacific University's Graduate and Professional programs. He drew upon the river imagery of Ezekiel 37 to describe the Reign of God.

Kevin MANNOIA said that God's Reign brings life to the disenfranchised, the abused, and the poor. We are the called-out ones engaged in this task. My prayer, he said, is that God will make us one.

One of the inspiring high points of the Workshop was the LARC (Evangelical-Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic) luncheon, followed by a brilliant presentation on *Papal Authority* by the former Archbishop of San Francisco, John QUINN.

He compared concepts of authority at the First Vatican Council (1870) and the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), and insisted that the role of the Pope includes a collegial relationship with all the bishops. The evidence he cited for this collegiality is the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, written in 1995.

Archbishop QUINN said it is time to ask other Christians about their attitudes toward the papacy. He assured the audience that communion with Rome does not mean absorption by the Roman Catholic Church.

I came away from this ecumenical smorgasbord with what my father used to describe, after enjoying a delicious meal, as a “pleasant sufficiency.” Ringing in my ears are the closing words of Lorelei FUCHS SA, who chaired this whole workshop: “Let us go forward to renew our commitment.”

## The Road to Unity

Shortly after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City in 2001, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) President, Gerald KIESCHNICK, went to Ground Zero together with former ELCA Presiding Bishop, H. George ANDERSON, and then joined him in a gathering of pastors who prayed and sang hymns together.

Missouri Synod critics accused Gerald KIESCHNICK of *unionism*, because these pastors were not in total doctrinal agreement. Nevertheless, Gerald KIESCHNICK has been re-elected to his presidential post.

Then-Atlantic District President David BENKE offered a prayer in Jesus Christ’s name at Yankee Stadium, standing together on the same platform with representatives of various Christian and non-Christian religions.

He was charged with the heresy of *syncretism*, but has since been acquitted. Admittedly, interreligious worship has its controversial aspects, because it can mislead people into assuming that all religious traditions are basically the same, thus compromising our conviction of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ.

Even Pope JOHN PAUL II, when gathering Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and other members of a whole spectrum of religious faiths at Assisi in 1986, made this subtle theological distinction: “We have not come here to pray together, but we have come together to pray.”

Without dealing with the interreligious issue for the moment (although my attendance at the Parliament of the World Religions in 1993 equips me to do this), I want to highlight the ingenious policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in striving for “full communion” with other Christian denominations.

It was with an ecumenical vision that the creative staff in the ELCA’s Department for Ecumenical Affairs applied some important Evangelical-Lutheran principles to meet the challenge of Christian unity. Here are three of them:

1. *The satis est of the Augsburg Confession.* Article VII of this historic statement of faith (from 1530) that is regarded as normative by all Evangelical-Lutherans worldwide says that “for the true unity of the Church it is enough (*satis est*) to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.”

Critics might call the ecumenical application of this principle Gospel reductionism. I suggest that it is *Gospel centralism*, and those who deny its intended potential for fostering unity with other Christians have, in effect, altered the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

2. *The concept of adiaphora.* Moving from a Latin to a Greek term, this means that

some cherished points of controversy, like the historic episcopate of the Anglican tradition, are not considered essential for unity.

They are *adiaphora*, or “indifferent things, neither commanded nor forbidden by God” (Formula of Concord, Article X). Thus, the Evangelical-Lutherans made a distinction between what is essential and what is important.

They also exercised some useful Evangelical-Lutheran freedom, as did other Evangelical-Lutheran communions, to interpret the historic episcopate more broadly and accept it for the sake of unity.

3. *Unity in Reconciled Diversity*. This is an ecumenical model advanced by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) that finds its theological basis again in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession:

“It is not necessary for the true unity of Christ’s Church that ceremonies, instituted by people, should be observed uniformly in all places.” The key concept here is not uniformity, but diversity.

It is the Anglicans who in the past have claimed to be the bridge church, as a rallying point for all other churches. But is it possible that the Evangelical-Lutherans, just by being confessionally Evangelical-Lutheran, have now earned this title?

### Addressing the Ultimate Ecumenical Challenge

What is the ultimate ecumenical challenge for the Evangelical-Lutherans and Roman Catholics? Is it our differences regarding the authority of Scripture? Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman Catholic scholars were able to say together: “Holy Scripture has preeminent status as the Word of God.”

This was part of a dialogue report, *Scripture and Tradition* (1995), based on the ninth in a series of conversations in the United States, on a wide range of doctrinal issues that began in 1965 at the conclusion of the historic Second Vatican Council, convened by Popes JOHN XXIII and PAUL VI.

Other ultimate ecumenical challenges were met by reaching significant agreements on the *Nicene Creed* (1965), *Baptism* (1966), *Eucharist* (1967), *Ministry* (1970), *Papal Primacy* (1974), *Infallibility* (1978), *Justification by Faith* (1985), and the *One Mediator, the Saints and Mary* (1992).

One problem with these nine rounds of dialogues is that the agreements were never officially received by the sponsoring churches. The Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians who participated did their work well. But the important results of the dialogues lacked widespread publicity and acceptance.

One ultimate ecumenical challenge, then, is moving forward together from theological conversation and convergence to the process of *reception*, that is, bringing these agreements into the life of the denominations so that they become officially accepted and taught and preached for the edifying and uniting of God’s people.

It happened on an international level when representatives of the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* at Augsburg, Germany, on October 31, 1999. This has since led to a consideration of the wider ecumenical context of the *Joint Declaration*.

If there could be another historic signing ceremony, perhaps at Rome next time,

what might be the ultimate ecumenical challenge that would at long last be resolved? What is the primary obstacle to unity between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches?

The *Dominus Iesus* (DI) document has turned me into “a tamed ecumenical optimist.” Authored by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2000, it maintains that non-Roman Catholic churches “suffer from defects” and “are not Churches in the proper sense”.

Even the *Joint Declaration* includes a hint of this in footnote nine: “The word ‘church’ is used in this *Declaration* to reflect the self-understanding of the participating churches, without intending to resolve the ecclesiological issue related to this term.”

*Dominus Iesus* further identifies the crux of the matter by affirming that ecclesial entities outside of Rome “lack full communion with the Roman Catholic church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy” (of the Pope).

There are some encouraging developments, though, regarding what many would regard as the ultimate ecumenical challenge. There is a new realization that Christian unity requires agreement not only on matters of faith, but also of order.

It is not only doctrinal issues that divide us, but ecclesiological questions about structure, polity, episcopacy and papacy. These are more than upper-stratosphere issues reserved for the theologically elite to ponder.

It is my growing conviction that those denominations that are episcopally ordered are less likely to experience schism. We Evangelical-Lutherans cherish our documentary basis for unity by subscribing to the historic Confessions of the sixteenth century.

But those Christian denominations which emphasize loyalty to a bishop have developed a more personal basis for unity, identifying with a shepherd whose succession is traced to the apostles.

The ultimacy of all this lies in the possibility that one bishop might play the role of a universal shepherd for all Christians, a servant of the servants of God. Here are three recent efforts to sort all this out:

1. In Pope JOHN PAUL II's encyclical of 1995, *Ut Unum Sint*, he speaks of “the real but imperfect communion that exists between us” because the papacy itself, as presently constituted, is an obstacle to unity.

But he invites “Church leaders and their theologians to engage in a patient and fraternal dialogue” regarding the papacy, and declares that “the primacy is nonetheless open to a new situation.”

2. The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues completed Round Ten in 2004, and report six points of clear convergence on the theme: “The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries.”

3. On an international level, these ecclesiological issues, including the ultimate ecumenical challenge of the papacy, are currently being addressed in conversations between the LWF and the Vatican. They have chosen “Apostolicity of the Church” as their overarching topic.

The word “apostolicity” reminds me of a Roman Catholic priest and professor from Tanzania at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey in Switzerland who admonished us not to become “abstract scholars,” but “apostles of unity.”

And this is truly a holy vocation. As a consequence of our calling, we are convinced that these ultimate ecumenical challenges must be addressed not only globally, regionally and nationally, but also locally, by all of us.



FEDOR Mónika

# Vision of Youth in Service for Unity: On the IX<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre

*“The ecumenical formation of youth is of decisive importance for the future of the ecumenical movement. The quality and quantity of persons interested in ecumenical life, both in the WCC and elsewhere, is declining. The survival of the ecumenical movement is largely conditioned on the active and responsible involvement of youth. A vision requires visionaries to dream and struggle for its realisation. The preparation of a new ecumenical generation is imperative. It must become a major focus for the ecumenical movement. The future belongs to those who have the vision and courage to shape it.”*  
(ARAM I)

*It might be perceived from the quotation above that our article is a report of a young steward's experience of the Assembly in Porto Alegre (Brazil), February 14–23, 2006, with some attempts at interpretation together with some lessons for the future.*

*Participating in the IX<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a young Roman Catholic person was a unique experience. Thanks to the Magyar Roman Catholic Bishop's Conference and the Magyar Ecumenical Council of Churches for their support and personal advice.*

## Preparation and Youth Assembly

Serious preliminary training of European stewards and youth delegates was organised by the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) as a preparation for the Assembly in November 2005 in Sinaia, Romania.

Among other important things, the participants at this training familiarized themselves with the structure and decision-making process of the WCC; they got to know church politics and the newly introduced consensus method. The fact that trainings were organised in many European countries and other parts of the world shows how important it is to train young people ecumenically.

Moreover, the Assembly was anticipated by a brief so-called Youth Pre-Assembly (11–13 February). All of the stewards and many young delegates and other young people participated, all together around 250 youth.

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The main purpose of this pre-Assembly was to provide the chance for young people to get acquainted with one another and find connections. Therefore the programme contained elements such as icebreakers and small group discussions.

Beyond the practical information, the preparation was helped by an introduction to the venue, the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul and the topics of the Ecumenical Conversations.

During the afternoon spent together with the participants of the Women's Pre-Assembly, a play was performed about the consensus method. This shows what a strong emphasis was put on the method that ensures listening to all opinions.

Samuel KOBIA, General Secretary of WCC, gave an introduction to the theme on the first afternoon of the Youth Pre-Assembly. Samuel KOBIA was given a tremendous reception; the atmosphere was warm and welcoming when he invited the youth to dialogue.

Among his suggestions, Samuel KOBIA emphasized the idea of having a global youth president instead of a young regional president. In this model, alongside the seven regional and the two orthodox presidents there would be a distinct youth president responsible for making sure the voices of young people are represented at the highest level in WCC. In this way, the current system of electing at least one regional president who is under the age thirty-five would be discontinued.

To support this idea, he drafted very clear and understandable reasons—especially in connection with representation that is the main role of a president. A too-young regional president is hardly acknowledged, but the same person as youth president would be suitable to represent the WCC.

After this meeting, it seemed youth were going to gain real representation. It was certainly a misunderstanding that according to a press release it was the young people who suggested the idea of a global youth president to the General Secretary.

Furthermore, Samuel KOBIA encouraged the youth to participate actively: "The Assembly can transform you, and you can transform the Assembly as well. Without young people, we cannot have the kind of challenge that has kept the ecumenical movement active and relevant."

All in all, the pre-Assembly was a good opportunity for young people to immerse themselves in the themes of the Assembly, formulate and share their thoughts, and from this start their participation tuned up for the Assembly.

The preparation for the ecumenical conversations should also be emphasized, where all young people were invited irrespective of their capacities. Though complete preparation was hindered by organisational and other difficulties, in many groups time was dedicated to the youth contribution.

## **Real Ecumenical Youth Participation**

"God, in Your grace, let the youth transform the world"—prayed the youth on the last Central Committee Meeting before the Assembly; they called for a more open Church, more relevant theology, more credible ecumenism and a more participatory society.

ARAM I, Catholicos of Cilicia and moderator of the WCC, said in reply: “Youth have a special role in *being Church*. I consider the role of youth as being essentially an agent of transformation. We must help the youth to move from the fringes of our churches to the heart of the churches’ life and witness, including the decision-making processes. I cannot imagine a Church without its youth. They ensure the Church’s vitality and renewal. Youth should be actors, not merely listeners; they should be leaders, not merely followers.”

In accordance with the demand formulated above, during preparation and in press releases the role of youth and the intention to make it a Youth Assembly was strongly emphasised. The reasons referring to this were put into words also in the Report of the General Secretary and in the report of the Moderator:

“If we do not empower our youth, they will find other *spaces* outside the Church and the ecumenical movement to create their own networks and seek other ways of expressing their concerns, their dreams and visions. The IIX<sup>th</sup> Assembly was a Jubilee Assembly. This Assembly must become a Youth Assembly, not only by a strong youth presence, but also by their impact-making participation and challenging perspectives.”

The General Secretary, Samuel KOBIA, encouraged youth and called the audience to involve youth better into the ecumenical work. He also pointed out one of the most important aspects of this partnership:

“Young people need opportunities to experience the joy of working and praying with others from different traditions and different contexts. ...

“The time has come, when we must not only open opportunities to young people for their ecumenical growth and leadership, but where we must learn from the innovative and dynamic models of ecumenical relationships that youth can teach us.

“As an ecumenical and intergenerational family, we need to humble ourselves and to listen to young people. It was with young people that the ecumenical movement was born. It is young people’s passion and insight today that will ensure the relevance and vitality of it. Without young people our ecumenical family is incomplete.

“At this time we need to nurture meaningful relationships and shared leadership between the generations. Young people need to know that they are important partners and that we are open to learning from their ecumenical experience. ...

“They can help all of us to understand better where we are going and what kind of response is required of us. The issues that engage the ecumenical movement today are the issues which attract young people. But they need to be invited in. And they need to be equipped and supported to participate.”

## Proportion of Youth at the Assembly

Regarding the proportion of youth, ARAM I said: “Youth have a major role to play in *being ecumenical*. They are called to become actively involved in reshaping and transforming the ecumenical movement. When we organise meetings or appoint committees, we should not regard youth as merely an appendix or a separate category. The question of youth is neither about quotas nor about programmes directed specifically at youth. I want to see youth actively present in all categories, in all places, in all areas,

and at all levels of the whole life and witness of the Church and the ecumenical movement.”

Regarding the question of the youth proportion in the Central Committee, the highest level of governance, it was planned to be twenty-five percent. Since the members of the Central Committee are Church delegates, realising the plan depends mainly on the cooperation of member churches.

In Porto Alegre, unfortunately, it did not happen. After the first nominations, the percentage of proposed delegates under thirty was only 13,5 percent. Then after some more negotiations this rate increased to 15 percent.

Talking about numbers is also important, since these numbers can be interpreted as signs of trust towards young Christian adults on behalf of the Church, which begins with the election of delegations.

Following this, let us quote the General Secretary again: “I challenge all of you Church leaders here at the Assembly to look at ways that your young people can participate. I call on all of us—ecumenical organizations, denominational structures, international and regional ecumenical bodies—to commit ourselves to youth. We have tried very hard to make this a youth assembly, but we have only partly succeeded. It needs the will and commitment of all of us.”

The idea of a global youth president mentioned before engaged the attention of youth until the last moments. They gathered in different circles and drafted documents to express their opinions.

At last, at this Assembly there was no youth president elected, neither on a global nor on a regional level. This fact equally saddened the young delegates, the stewards, other young participants and for sure, other less young participants as well.

Let us close this topic with the words of ARAM I: “I fully associate myself with the youths’ firm commitment and clear vision. As Head of Church and as Moderator, I have always enjoyed and been enriched listening to the youth in my church and in ecumenical circles. Listening to the youth! What a challenge to each of us sitting on chairs of authority in our respective churches and in ecumenical institutions! Certainly, youth have an important role to play in our Church, the ecumenical movement and our societies. But, to simply state that idea is not enough. We must engage them fully in the total life of the Church and the ecumenical movement at large.”

## Experience of Youth at the Assembly

There were other ways for young people to participate at the Assembly as well. Along with the discussions of the delegates and taking part in the official programme, there were meetings called *mutirão*. The *mutirão* is a Brazilian term expressing an action of people who bring together what they have for a common and bigger benefit.

This is exactly what happened in the frame of this programme: numerous exhibitions, workshops, panel discussions and other interesting activities were organised by people who were willing to share their experience and knowledge.

Therefore participants were able to have the feeling that there were two parallel assemblies: one in the plenary hall where decisions were made to influence the next seven years of the Council, and another one on the entire campus where one could learn and experience the varied and colourful Christianity.

One of the pillars of the Assembly was common prayer on the theme of the title and Bible study. In the mornings and evenings there was time for prayers and worship, and there was time to study the Bible in smaller groups as well. According to some participants this was the most important and most joyful part of the programme.

For this Assembly more than four thousand Christians arrived from many parts of the globe. This made visible that the search for unity inspired by the Holy Spirit captivated the whole world. In Porto Alegre, we could experience the variety of regions and denominations together with the painful division.

Also among stewards, representatives of almost all denominations could be found. It was a great happiness to see Roman Catholic young people working with the same enthusiasm as the others.

Though the Roman Catholic Church is not (yet) a member of the WCC, beyond Cardinal Walter KASPER, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, a number of observers were sent, and many theologians and young people were present. Also this presence points to the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has committed itself irreversibly to the work for unity.

## The Experience of Stewards at the Assembly

From one hundred countries, nearly 150 young people contributed to the success of the Assembly. Among stewards, people with disabilities found their role and shared the work as well.

Moreover, their presence motivated the others to solidarity and sharing. There was a young woman in a wheelchair whose personality fascinated everyone and showed an example with her kindness and stamina also in the hard and tiring moments.

Already in Porto Alegre stewards started to interpret their experiences; this spiritual work is still going on, since everybody has returned with ecumenical change in their minds and all of us have a need to multiply and share this.

Following this common reflection, we would like to describe now the most important lessons of the Assembly for stewards. Its basis is the continuous virtual communication among stewards.

We could be members of a community that *encompasses* the whole world. Anybody can be a member of this community irrespective of gender, age, skin colour, cultural background, origin or way of thinking, which are so important elsewhere. To be a part of this enormous *communion* gives courage and self-confidence to really transform the world in God's grace together.

Then again the cultural variety can cause difficulties. It was hard to find our places in this colour-cavalcade. Many of us could feel a bit lost in *diversity* at the beginning, but at the same time we could experience the collaboration of people with different cultures from all over the world.

As stewards, we experienced the importance and meaning of *stewardship* and *service*. The work, even the minor roles, contributed to the obstacle-free run of the Assembly; all kinds of help were instrumental in the bigger whole.

At the Assembly we made lifelong *friendships*. The common work, prayers and amusement made bonds that are able to stay strong even from distant places of the world. The common work formed our personality as well while experiencing the *service of leadership*. This experience can be beneficial in other walks of life, too.

All these together, the preparation, the experience of unity in diversity, stewardship and leadership in bonds of friendship meant a sort of *ecumenical formation*, which is necessary for blessed and effective work.

Finally, I finish with the *spiritual message* and experience of the Assembly: together with some other stewards, far from the noise of the Assembly and the fight for percentages, we used to go up to the top of our hotel to pray under the starry sky. The most memorable moments for us were these prayers and singings and a worship on the last morning led by a young woman pastor who was present as a steward.

Beside common action, common praying is indispensable. This gives the main spiritual content of the struggle for unity. Ecumenical efforts have perspectives only with common prayers: "God, in Your grace, transform the world!"

Ignacio T. MONZALVO

# ¿Qué es y Como se Vive el Ecumenismo?

*El tema del ecumenismo se ha tratado desde diferentes espacios de la Iglesia. En la mayoría de los casos se hace alusión a la convivencia con otras personas que no comparten nuestra misma forma de ser Iglesia.*

*Nuestros tiempos nos demandan como Iglesia una participación más activa con la finalidad de desenmascarar la idolatría que se esconde en los sistemas que impiden al ser humano ser pleno, libre y salvo.*

*Desde la tradición cristiana el ecumenismo no puede ser un tema olvidado o ignorado pues el hacer esto iría en contra de la fundamental enseñanza y misión de Jesucristo: la liberación y salvación del ser humano.*

*Para abordarlo, interculturalidad, dialogo interreligioso y memoria histórica son elementos permanentes en el ecumenismo. Conocerlos nos permitirá vivirlo con la finalidad de habitar la casa común para una vida digna de todas y todos.*

## ¿Qué es el Ecumenismo?

La palabra ecumenismo tiene su origen en la lengua griega. ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΕ (*oikouméne*) que significa: Tierra u Orbe. Los cristianos del S. I. le dieron una connotación diferente al utilizar esta palabra para referirse a la convivencia en el *mundo habitado* que en la corriente helenista tenía connotaciones políticas e imperiales.

Para Helio GALLARDO el ecumenismo resulta ser un término común en cuanto a asociar la universalidad de la trascendencia de la Iglesia en el ámbito de la convivencia digna y humana.

El ecumenismo se presenta como *la posibilidad de contribuir al cuidado de la casa de todos considerando las dimensiones políticas, económicas, culturales y religiosas de nuestro momento histórico a partir de nuestra fe en Cristo.*

Jesucristo deja a sus discípulos la misión de ir y propagar su palabra haciendo discípulos (Mt. 28,16–20; Mc. 16,14–18; Lc. 24,36–49; Jn. 20,19–23). Para ellos el mandato se concreta en el mundo habitado. Es aquí donde tienen que hacer discípulos para que aprendan y guarden la enseñanza del Cristo.

Jesucristo no funda una Iglesia, nos da la posibilidad de ser cristianos en un mundo en el que la liberación y la salvación se hacen elementos fundamentales de nuestra sociedad.



En Jesucristo la dimensión de la salvación social no está divorciada de la salvación espiritual. Llevar consuelo a los desprotegidos, acompañar a los marginados y sentarse con los pobres era su ministerio. Jesucristo tenía una misión que ahora compartimos como Iglesia: *El Reino de Dios y la liberación y salvación*.

La primera apela a la instauración de un reinado de Dios mediante la justicia, dignificación y búsqueda de la verdad (Lc. 4,43; Lc. 8,1). Como parte de su tradición cultural y consciente de la trascendencia histórica, Jesucristo apela a su misión mesiánica y la conecta con el sufrimiento de un pueblo que está clamando por la liberación (Lc. 4,18).

La segunda nos refiere a la dignidad rescatada del ser humano para salvación. A Jesucristo no le importaba si eran judíos, romanos o de cualquier otra nacionalidad, origen y creencia. Un centurión se acerca a Jesucristo con la finalidad de pedir sanidad para su siervo (Mt. 8,5–13; Lc. 7,1–10).

Ahí estaba conquistador y conquistado, opresor y oprimido en todas las dimensiones sociales. Las diferencias eran grandes, provenían de culturas y religiones desiguales, y, por lo tanto, de cosmovisiones, usos y costumbres diferentes.

Jesucristo trasciende a esas diferencias y sistematiza la salvación en la fe. La necesidad de creer que Jesucristo puede sanar, salvar y liberar nuestra vida es la verdadera Iglesia Cristiana. Cuando Jesucristo escuchó lo que el centurión tenía que decirle Él responde:

*“De cierto os digo que ni aun en Israel he hallado tanta fe. Os digo que vendrán muchos de oriente y de occidente, y se sentaran con Abraham, Isaac y Jacob en el reino de los cielos”* (Mt. 8,10b–11).

Para Jesucristo la importancia de traer el Reino de Dios está por encima de las diferencias que se pudieran presentar entre las mujeres y hombres de su tiempo. Sin duda alguna el centurión ahora tendría otra perspectiva de la vida y de la opresión.

No sabemos que pasó con él, pero sin duda Jesucristo cambió su vida. De manera que la dimensión real de la salvación, la liberación e instauración del Reino está definida por la fe en un momento histórico específico y concreto y su interacción social.

Hoy se hace necesario que nos preguntemos si nuestra fe está lo suficientemente fundada en Jesucristo como para ignorar las diferencias y ser actores de cambio social. Frente este panorama surge la necesaria pregunta: ¿Qué es lo que hay que rechazar que impide la plenitud de la humanidad?

La respuesta se presenta casi obvia: Es necesario rechazar lo que impide al ser humano ser pleno. Es indispensable que levantemos nuestra voz en contra de los sistemas que nos oprimen.

Es necesario que asumamos nuestra responsabilidad social frente a las injusticias de nuestros tiempos. No podemos permitir que se pisotee la vida de otros seres humanos en nombre de la modernidad, tecnología o religión.

El ecumenismo no se presenta como una traición a nuestra fe cristiana, muy por el contrario, se presenta como la posibilidad de vivir y practicar nuestra fe en toda su dimensión y con toda su posibilidad de ser, sentirnos y sabernos Iglesia Cristiana y en el camino podremos encontrar hermanas y hermanos, que como el centurión creen y tienen nuestra misma fe.

## **Interculturalidad y Ecumenismo: La Necesidad de una Fe Cristocéntrica**

Hablamos de interculturalidad cuando dos o más culturas interactúan socialmente con un fin determinado y sin la posibilidad de que se vea amenazada su cultura. De manera que la interculturalidad defiende la diversidad cultural y la necesidad y/o derechos de cada pueblo a tener su cultura.

En la cultura podemos encontrar nuestros fundamentos de legitimidad y ética funcional con la sociedad. Las normas de usos y costumbres definen nuestra manera de actuar y trascender nuestro espacio a uno más amplio.

La interculturalidad o, mejor dicho, la práctica de la cultura desde el contexto y las exigencias reales de la sociedad en su diálogo con otras culturas, se presenta como la gran oportunidad para que la Iglesia logre una verdadera universalidad.

La universalidad de la Iglesia está definida por la práctica liberadora de sus miembros y la medida en que cada uno de estos se asuma socialmente en sus espacios productivos con identidad cristiana.

El ecumenismo y la interculturalidad, entonces, no se presentan como una alternativa religiosa o eclesial. Por el contrario se complementan con la finalidad de afirmar nuestra fe y cultura en la diversidad de espacios sociales.

El proceso de globalización neoliberal que el mundo entero esta experimentando ha obligado a millones de seres humanos a emigrar de sus lugares de origen, teniendo como consecuencia que las y los personas tengan que interactuar con otras personas de diferentes culturas.

Hoy resulta común ver que conviven africanos, guatemaltecos, nicaragüenses, argentinos, chilenos, mexicanos, chinos, japoneses y muchas otras nacionalidades con culturas diferentes. Sin embargo, está no es la única interacción pluricultural que encontramos.

Nosotros mismos tenemos toda una serie de influencias culturales que determinan nuestra identidad. Apellido materno y paterno ya implican dos identidades diferentes. Nacionalidad, Estado natal, ciudad, pueblo, comunidad son elementos que rigen en buena medida nuestro origen cultural.

Y en sentido inverso, no sólo somos mexicanos, también somos latinoamericanos, americanos y ciudadanos del mundo. El ser cristiano ya implica toda una historia de más de 2000 años que norman nuestro actuar en el terreno de lo religioso y ético.

Por ejemplo: En el caso de un individuo protestante presbiteriano su origen de elección religiosa se determina primero por toda una tradición al interior de la Iglesia Católica Romana hasta el siglo XVI en que Martín LUTERO inicia el movimiento de la Reforma Protestante en Alemania y posteriormente con Juan CALVINO que se considera el fundador de la Iglesia Calvinista, misma de la cual surge la Iglesia Presbiteriana y que posteriormente llega a México con los misioneros norteamericanos.

Por otra parte nuestra elección profesional es también determinante en la formación de nuestra identidad; arquitectos, abogados, médicos, plomeros, carpinteros, vendedores ambulantes y todo un universo de elecciones nutren nuestra cultura, identidad, manera de vivir y convivir con nuestros vecinos, compañeros de trabajo, amigas y amigos. Cada uno con su universo de identidad y cultura definido.

De manera que ecumenismo e interculturalidad se entrelazan con la posibilidad que desde nuestro espacio y universo definido podamos dar testimonio de una fe cristiana que se determina y reconoce por una fe cristocéntrica al servicio de una sociedad que clama por la defensa de nuestras tradiciones y culturas en un espacio común que se llama país, estado, municipio, pueblo, colonia, barrio.

La interculturalidad en paralelo con el ecumenismo nos permite reflexionar en los elementos que son liberadores e inclusivos social y culturalmente desde una perspectiva cristiana ecuménica.

Tener una visión social y cultural ecuménica nos permite discernir nuestros tiempos con la finalidad de desenmascarar la opresión y buscar una paz social que dignifique a los niños, mujeres, indígenas y otros grupos que por años los hemos mantenido en el olvido.

Ante semejante reto es necesario reflexionar en torno a la Iglesia Universal. *La dimensión eclesial en la participación y reflexión social debe ser una voz profética que se haga escuchar en todos los niveles.*

Si la Iglesia quiere asumir su papel profético y trascender en la historia para hacer de ella una historia de salvación es necesario considerar el dialogar con otras confesiones con la finalidad de encontrar puntos asimétricos y proyectar un frente común ecuménico.

## **Dialogo Interreligioso y Ecumenismo**

El diálogo interreligioso se presenta en nuestro momento histórico como un medio por el cual podemos hacer escuchar la voz de las marginadas y oprimidas, y los marginados y primados desde nuestra fe. Nuestra elección religiosa, como mencionamos anteriormente, está determinada por todo un universo cultural y de opciones personales.

La Iglesia como institución social se ve representada por una serie de elecciones que hacemos en relación a nuestra fe y la manera en que vivimos ésta. De manera que si hemos decidido ser miembros de la Iglesia Católica Romana (por ejemplo) es porque han influido dos factores: *historia y elección.*

### *Historia*

La historia en la dimensión de nuestro recorrido cultural y en la determinación de nuestra manera de ser y actuar. La elección; en nuestra asimilación de la responsabilidad social desde la fe en nuestro contexto histórico.

Crear en Cristo como salvador es el fundamento de nuestra fe, la manera en que liturgia y doctrina se presenten en nuestro momento definido debe estar ligada a la dimensión de nuestra convicción de la existencia de Dios.

Si la fe, reflexión y la acción están fundamentadas en la enseñanza y misión de Jesucristo y en la existencia de Dios como criterio de verdad con la finalidad de servir a los que menos tienen, a las marginadas y oprimidas, y a los marginados y oprimidos, entonces se hace necesario y fundamental abrimos al dialogo con quienes comparten el mismo principio de acción y fe para acompañar y solidarizarnos con los pobres.

No basta que la Iglesia tenga que preocuparse por entender su contexto utilizando los recursos exegéticos, históricos y conceptuales que son propios de la labor teológica, es necesario que al interior de nuestra realidad reconozcamos la necesidad de sabernos como una única Iglesia y que desde la diferencia religiosa podamos abrir nuevos horizontes al mundo, a la humanidad, que espera que desde la trinchera de la fe ofrezcamos una alternativa que tenga como fin la libertad del ser humano por medio de la liberación y salvación.

### *Elección*

Hablar de *elección* en nuestra opción eclesial tiene diversas dimensiones. Esta se define por la unidad y la inclusión social. Hemos decidido creer en Jesucristo bajo ciertos criterios que creemos verdaderos y en consecuencia nos congregamos los que hemos decidido creer de la misma manera y bajo los mismos criterios de fe.

Al interior de tres grandes religiones del mundo Cristianismo, Judaísmo e Islamismo existen diversas corrientes eclesiales con características similares pero con sus particularidades en las que los fieles se reconocen como parte de la respectiva religión en una corriente determinada.

Decir que la religión es pura sociología sería limitado e incorrecto, sin embargo, desconocer ésta dimensión sería igualmente erróneo. La religión debe verse como una institución social en la que sus fieles son sujetos actuantes en los espacios de producción y reproducción de la vida, sistema y fe.

Desde la práctica eclesial cristiana una norma de fe es el prójimo. Reconocerlo como nuestro próximo sin ver etiquetas religiosas, políticas, económicas es el llamado supremo de Jesucristo a fortalecer una Iglesia que no está definida por instituciones.

Al hablar de dialogo interreligioso nos introducimos a la sociología de la religión como elemento normativo, pero igualmente se apela a la experiencia histórica y trascendente. Es necesario hacer referencia a que la Iglesia sea cual sea su credo o denominación es una estructura social que está normada por la fe y la sociedad.

Es el compromiso con el ser humano en que encontramos el sentido salvífico de la fe cristocéntrica. Sin duda estar comprometido con Dios es estarlo con el ser humano. Desde esta visión el dialogo interreligioso y el ecumenismo nos presentan la misma opción pero desde dos perspectivas diferentes.

Por un lado el ecumenismo se presenta como un llamado social a la reflexión y acción desde nuestra fe para habitar en armonía la casa común. En tanto, el dialogo interreligioso es el llamado eclesial insertado en la sociedad para asumir el reto de trascender nuestra opción e historia eclesial en armonía con otras perspectivas de una fe.

Pensar el ecumenismo como un nuevo horizonte de práctica eclesial es sin duda una respuesta factible a los tiempos que vivimos en donde le interculturalidad, elección, dialogo en la dimensión trascendente puede hacer de la política, economía y cultura una alternativa de inclusión y defensa de la dignidad por las y los mas pobres de nuestras sociedades.

Tony GENCO

# Celebrating our Differences and a Call to Civic Engagement

*As Canadians, we engage one another as to what it means to be citizens of the world and what the important issues facing us are. We are creating a society here that is not Europe but it is not the United States either.*

*Our country constantly searches for its identity generally, as do our communities, yet we seem to find it easier to define ourselves more by what we are not than by what we are. This bolsters us in our inferiority complex when it comes to many parts of the world and our superiority complex when we talk about our country as we define our society as peaceful and tolerant nation.*

*The challenge is therefore how do we define ourselves as a people, as a society, and as a nation? What is the special way in which the world should view us? What is our brand? Does it have meaning and how do we contribute significantly to the creation of a better world while we celebrate who we are by just being, just living, just making it work? Where do we go from here? How do we grow from here? Who are we?*

## **People still Finding ourselves**

I believe that we are a people still finding ourselves. The Canadian nation is one of conquests of a different sort. It is a country of accommodation. It is not a country of war. It is a country of compromise.

But does that compromise mean that we never make direct choices so that we can be safe with ourselves? The roads here are wider and newer than most parts of Europe, yet we replicate American society and claim to be independent of influences and make our own choices.

We aver shunning density and development sprawl, yet we seem in many places to live that way; interestingly, we do not seem to connect nearly as well with our friends South of the border.

When Americans engage, it is with no-holds-barred, no-nonsense responses to issues. We try to have everyone get along and engage the world on our own terms without much understanding of what the consequences of our actions really are for everyone.

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And yet, there are places that we meet: our churches, our malls, where the locals connect, where we can know who we are. We keep our distance, we mind our own business and if we have to talk to someone whom we know, we meet and then discover it is not so bad after all. The odds of doing that in Toronto is harder given the anonymity of the city, but you can run into people that you know and you talk to them and find they do not bite.

## Multicultural Harmony

Our multicultural harmony is really a bunch of cells working separately and independently of one another. And this is our sense of self—without conflict, without challenges and without difficulties.

But perhaps *with* too many things that separate us from finding out what the true Canada can be. What more can we do to connect with one another on a human basis right in our own backyards?

Knowing how to do this better here is the key to ensuring that we can make a positive contribution to our world. Understanding ourselves and our place in the world would be the way to make that lasting impression on others that we want to emulate and support.

The boom in growth in our urban communities has brought about a diversity that was certainly not anticipated by our Mothers and Fathers of Confederation. People have made a choice to join us in our new lifestyle.

It does seem, though, that it is more about leaving something behind in favour of something new. It meant leaving a place where there may have been struggles and looking for Canada to be a place of new beginnings.

## Improving the Tapestry

It does not seem clear when coming to Canada, however, what those new beginnings really are about. When most people come to Canada they come with the expectation that they can take care of their families and live with those of similar backgrounds together without learning too much about Canada.

In some cases it becomes possible for people to simply speak only their own language and never learn any other. In some places in the United States this is possible too, but it is much more prevalent in Canada.

Why is that? Canada allows herself to become a caretaker of many, but does not have a personality beyond the fact that she does not have a personality. It is crucial that we find a way to join together.

But can we really join together, or will we remain sitting in our own clusters, refusing to connect as one community, prosperous and vibrant and distinctive from other communities?

Are we allowing ourselves not to connect, or is Canada failing us by not doing more than making us a place where we use the land and do not ever really become accepted as communities in good standing that can improve the tapestry of our local community? In the end are we all second-class and there is no first-class citizenry here?

## Football (Soccer) World Cup

The weeks surrounding the Football (Soccer) World Cup really brought this matter to a head. In a foreseeable move, some bright entrepreneurial minds came together with the World Cup and started selling flags.

They were so organized that you barely needed to go a block to find a stand at a corner, let alone at your typical plaza. We seem to have found our sense of individual expression by putting up flags of places of our pasts, all connecting to this event that happens every four years.

Unlike the Olympics, though, we see ourselves as members of those communities of our past. One of the good things for me has been that I have had to look up some flags that I had not ever known before to understand more about the person speeding past me on to their next challenge on their personal schedule.

We now can know more about them, at least during the World Cup. But amazingly, almost immediately following the end of the event, all the flags were put away. It was almost as if we were allowed to be patriotic to our past and then we were allowed to forget entirely for the next four years and resort to those that know us.

We were not to tell anyone else who we were anymore for fear that they might get too close to us. Only those who knew us already were allowed again to infiltrate our worlds. Where did all the flags go? And why did not the flags stay up? Perhaps more importantly, why did they have to go up in the first place?

## Celebrating our Differences

We can be intrigued by this patriotism by so many. It seems to be very prevalent here. But what is the nature of it? Is it because of a soccer game? Why are we being so patriotic to a land that we had to either abandon or were exiled from for economic or other reasons?

What does this say about our community when we keep looking to other communities we long ago abandoned to find our identity? Or are we crying out for wanting to belong, because we have not found a way to belong here and to be accepted in our own new country beyond ourselves?

Our optimistic side might think that this is a simple form of self-expression that is a celebration of our differences. At least that is what we say out loud: that our Canadianism demands us to be accepting and tolerant of this expression of diversity as it is what makes us whole.

It is this desire to be tolerant that allows us to accept all the nations of the world who have come to join us in their new beginnings. But we do not really plant roots in this new society, and we long to be a part of the past that we found to be problematic and not a part of whom we should be today.

So when I see these flags, I actually picture them as the proud maple leaf and our own Canadian flag flying proudly where we can express ourselves in such a manner. It is certainly something that we can be proud of, that riots do not take place when certain countries are more successful than others.

Perhaps that is because people stay in their areas of dominance and do not go into the

areas of others. Many of the countries people are praising would not allow any form of expression whatsoever. Those countries assert their own identities over everyone else's. This is how we define ourselves.

## Looking to the Future and Respecting the Past

All of this was in fact happening during a very special weekend for our country. Our country that was formed from more than a century of welcoming people from every part of the world needs to be acknowledged, too.

We have a country that looks to the future and respects the past, but is not a prisoner of it. But it seems many of us still long for a past that we left behind. What more can we do to live in our present, rather than be controlled by a false nostalgia for our past?

The real Canada of tomorrow is here. You need only to look around in order to see that future generations of new immigrants from the next fifty years will actually dominate the landscapes.

Where what we now think are unique and perhaps *non-Canadian* last names will be accepted as naturally Canadian. I hope that this will be the case in my lifetime. We need to continue to strive to create an awareness that the future of Canada needs to be and will be defined by the immigrants that are present today, more so than in any other period in our history.

And it is likely that rather than continuing to operate in our own niches of comfort and safety, we now need to engage one another more directly and forcefully to look around and share our collective sense of purpose that goes beyond our own individual needs and expectations of survival.

We belong here and we can make a difference right here and right now without being ashamed of our struggles and sacrifices of the past; but neither should we be trapped by those same things.

## A Wonderful Experiment

We need to chart a new future that is about our new wonderful experiment of Canada. This is one that comes together with a renewed sense of understanding along with tolerance, but does more than that.

It requires us to have a common purpose that is not divided by language or race or culture or region, but one that allows us to believe in this land as more than a place where we have an opportunity to engage—as really a place to celebrate.

We stand for something that is defining who we are and what we want to give back to a world that is in need of hope, that needs us to take a few risks and stop being so safe because we are afraid to offend everyone, including ourselves. Perhaps if we talked a bit more with one another, we might see more Canadian flags around us.

The first thing we need to do is to truly understand that there is something more to our land than land itself. Getting to know one another becomes the basis for our contribution to a world of new beginnings and not just a country where we park ourselves so that we can go home later.

Ironically, Canada was never a country that was borne out of pragmatism. With the great geographical divides and economic forces, Canada should not have worked at all.

Yet people of vision and character strove to make a difference and to believe that we could do something that was different and special and that could be attractive to the world.

And yet as those around us have taken risks, Canada never seemed to want to do that. It meant that many nations passed us by and we watched the agenda unfold around us and we contributed incrementally to it.

We became pragmatic almost for the sake of it without even knowing it. Going forward, can we as a civil society really operate on mere pragmatism? Most will realize that our form of pragmatism is not really pragmatic and new alignments of political and geographic interests need to be created. Does that mean the death of Canada in the long run? Hopefully not.

## Canadian Language

We love this country. Why? Because it is one of the few countries where you can have everything at your doorstep and not be a prisoner of your past. Your last name is not a limiting condition unless you desire it to be.

There is a business culture that you need to adjust to and to develop, but you can help change it, if you have the courage of your convictions. The opportunities to take all that is good about the country and contribute it as a model for the world are at our doorstep.

The psychology of most Canadians, though, is to remain passive without engaging these opportunities. The two languages become scary for many and yet for me the two languages are what really helps bridge the divide between Anglo- and Latin-based cultures.

I would love to see the day when Canadians outside of Montreal can converse in a new French and English and when neither is our official language. Our official language should be Canadian. We have mastered the ability to listen at this stage in our evolution. The next step is the time to act.

I believe that this approach will strengthen who we can become and what we can do to make the world a better place. Is our nation ready for this bold and innovative challenge? Are we afraid for what is to come? Probably not.

But who will stand up and fight for Canada? Who will help and create a new and improved Canada? It can and must be the immigrants of this past half-century. I have no doubt that they have the ability to do that. Will they accept the challenge? This remains the true outstanding issue for our nation.

## A Microcosm of Engagement

Back to the pre-World Cup decision period, someone at work put an Italian flag on my car. While grateful, I took it down. I am proud of my heritage, although I am part Spanish and French too, and share it with my daughter and my newborn son.

That is my yesterday. But now I am a Canadian. A Canadian is a person who engages and celebrates the complexity and diversity of the world, who does not judge what they see, but learns from it, shapes it and makes it better.

That is also the opportunity we have in our Canada: to create a microcosm of

engagement and learning and celebration and hope throughout our community, and a model society for the entire world.

I love my heritage, but I will not be prisoner to it. I love Canada more. This is my home and native land. Let us be proud of our future and our land of new beginnings. We will create it in every community we live in through our actions and activities and through being bold and innovative.

The next phase is the new and improved Canada. A Canada that is built beyond the physical and emotional barriers that we create; that we can engage and celebrate tolerance, but that makes choices and takes a stand through its innovation, passion and commitment to make itself a microcosm of the world; and that can truly lead in making a difference for people by taking the responsibility for change from within and without its borders.

## **A Revolution of Will**

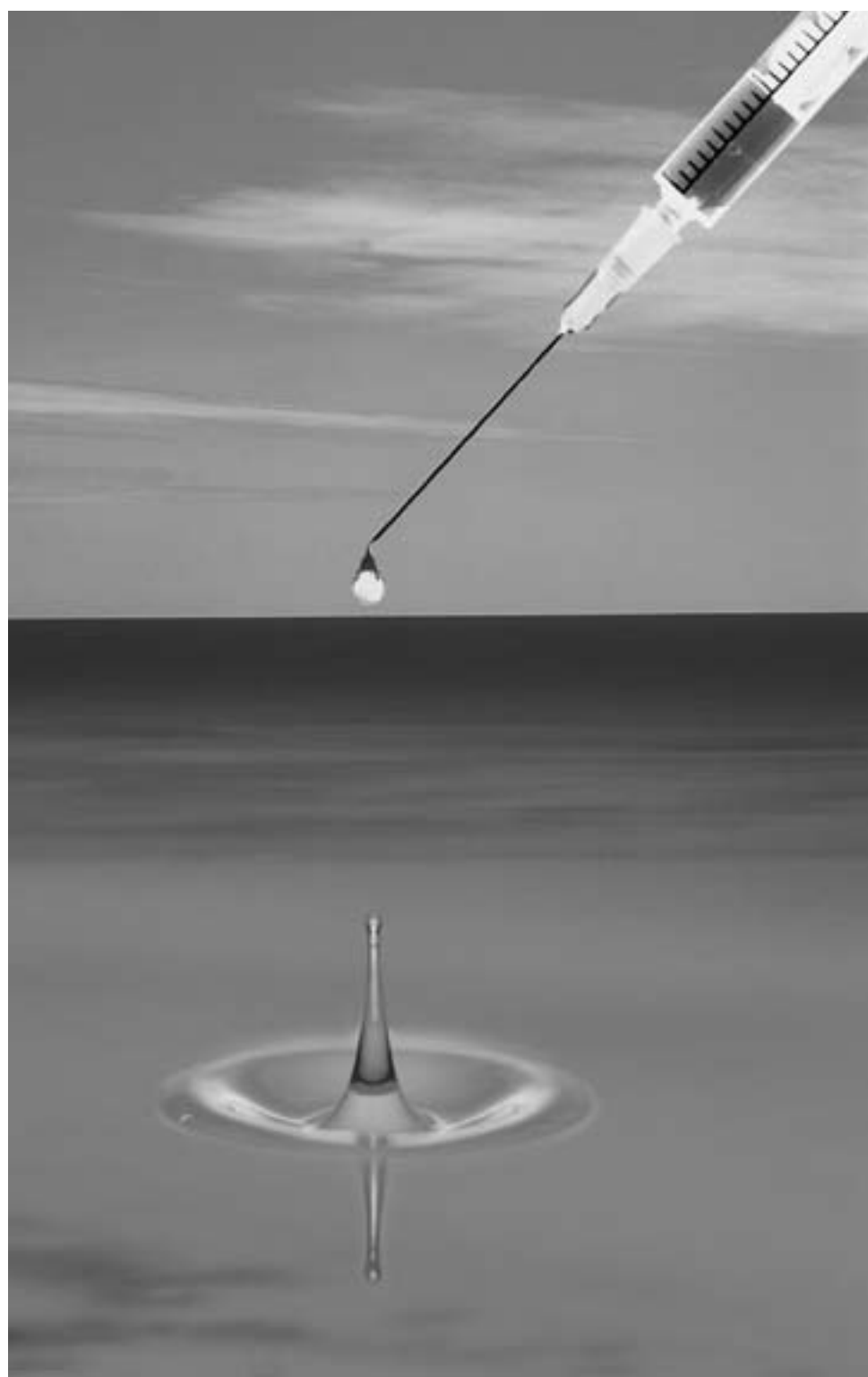
It must start from within, as we have all the ingredients here. We have generations of immigrants, we have an economy that continues to thrive and prosper and we have a society that is longing for growth from adolescence to adulthood.

As we learn more and continue to build together a community we can all be proud of, together we will create the new and improved Canada and the real world that is within our borders that is a model of how to strive for progress and hope for a better engagement of who we are, where we have been, but mostly where we are going.

I believe that we will all rise to the challenge. We really do not have a choice. We have been given such an important opportunity that we may be the last chance for the world to be the change we constantly talk about and want to celebrate.

There are many places throughout the world that are in need of hope. That hope is here in the way we treat those conflicts, not there as many of them cannot be helped where they come from. They make the difference by being the place where they can learn that the differences that they define in other places are differences that do not exist here.

Our civic pride and our ability to stand up and be counted as a community will become our calling card to the world that Canada can and will become the next and perhaps true superpower, not because of the economic clout it directly has or the amount of guns or soldiers in its army, but in her ability by sheer force of will and opportunity, that she can demonstrate how it is all done and be the envy of the world. We will be part of a revolution of will.



Serge (Jovanie) TANKEU KEUSSEU

# Jeunesse, VIH/SIDA et Empire: Quelles Actions?

*«Ce qui ne nous tue pas nous rend fort», c'est avec cette phrase peut-être prophétique pour les uns et encore philosophique pour les autres que nous entreprenons cette réflexion cruelle de notre action comme jeune et surtout chrétien face à l'interpellation décisive auxquelles nous parle le VIH/SIDA.*

*Voici plus de deux décennies que le VIH a été découvert; aujourd'hui encore en dépit de nombreuses avancés en matière de recherche médicale pour un traitement; seule les AntiRetroViraux sont disponible.*

*Comprendre la pandémie de VIH/SIDA en Afrique exige une compréhension profonde du quotidien des populations jeunes et moins jeunes; mais aussi la façon donc celles-ci vivent les affects profonds de tous les maux qui détruisent notre espoir et espérance.*

*Nous ne voudrions pas laisser croire que tout a été et est mal fait mais si çà et là, il y a eu des analyses, réflexions et actions profondes; elles n'ont certainement pas mérité autant de vacarmes que les approches d'abêtissements et d'aliénations publiques.*

*Comprendre ainsi l'ampleur de ce fléau, c'est être en mesure de se poser les questions justes sur les réalités qui entretiennent cette maladie dans nos contrées et rendent les hommes et les femmes d'Afrique aussi vulnérable face au plaisir. Cette réalité doit interpellier nos âmes et booster nos consciences intellectuelles, spirituelles, culturelles et sociales. A ces questions, nous situons notre problématique à trois niveaux.*

## La Réalité des Campagnes de Sensibilisations Spectaculaires

Certains gouvernements des pays en Afrique, Caraïbes et Pacifiques (ACP) avec le concours des experts de la communauté internationale et des bailleurs de fond; nous ont au cours de la seconde partie de la décennie des années quatre vingt dix, envahis avec des slogans et des campagnes qui ressemblaient plus à de campagnes publicitaires, à des shows médiatiques et à des concerts grand public qu'à une volonté manifeste d'apporter des réponses thérapeutiques aux problèmes du VIH/SIDA.

De part et d'autre dans nos pays se sont développés et organisés de gigantesques campagnes d'informations et de sensibilisations sans que les questions de qualité du message, de quantité du public cible, de niveau de compréhension des populations

de ce fléau ne soient véritablement résolues. Bref, ils nous ont apporté leurs théories fabriquées et conçues dans leurs bureaux, mais dépourvues de la façon dont nous vivons notre quotidien.

Tout donnant l'impression qu'il fallait au travers de ces campagnes « *abêtissements populaires* » justifier les milliers de francs octroyer par les partenaires et en contre partie faire la publicité d'un soit disant médicament qui posait un réel problème de valeurs culturelles et d'actions concertées.

A mon avis, ces spectacles ont présenté l'incapacité de la communauté internationale à comprendre les aspirations profondes de nos peuples et particulièrement de sa jeunesse. Pire elle s'est faite complice avec nos leaders de notre misère et de la détérioration des structures sanitaires, de la fracture du liens social et familial dans nos pays. Comme dans le cadre de la lutte contre la pauvreté avec leur Programme d'Ajustement Structurel (PAS), les bailleurs de fonds internationaux se sont non seulement voiler les objectifs, mais surtout tromper de cible. Ils ont contribué à banaliser la maladie dans certaines parties du nos communautés et a diabolisé sa perception dans d'autres. Et la société civile?

### **La Réalité du SIDA Gras et du SIDA Maigre**

Parler de VIH/SIDA sans parler des réalités qui s'y sont développées au cours de son évolution; c'est refuser de comprendre que cette maladie affecte et infecte autant les personnes physiques que les femmes et hommes, qui chaque jour se battent ou disent se battre pour la maîtrise de cette pandémie.

Nous situons notre interpellation sur cette réalité parce que depuis quelques années s'est développé autour des discours et ambitions politiques de nos leaders, dans la vision et la mission de beaucoup d'organisation non-gouvernementale (ONG): le concept VIH/SIDA. De plus, le nombre le notre d'organisation non-gouvernementale (ONG), qui travaille ou lutte contre le VIH/SIDA s'est multiplié par cinq, dix voir quinze. Tout donne à croire que nos leaders et nos ONGs avaient et ont compris le problème.

A notre avis, c'est non! Car il s'est développé autour de ce fléau un dynamisme du SIDA Maigre et du SIDA Gras. Nous définissons le SIDA maigre comme étant la réalité de toutes personnes infectées et affectées qui souffrent et meurent chaque jour de cette maladie dans une indifférence totale et le SIDA gras comme étant celle de cette autre poignée d'individus qui s'enrichissent de la maladie. En d'autres termes, pendant que certains s'appauvrissent à cause du ravage qu'implique le SIDA, d'autres par contre s'enrichissent. Le constat dans nos pays est que les personnes, qui au travers de leurs discours et leur association prétendent lutter contre le SIDA, se sont de façon rapide, enrichies sur le dos des personnes infectées et affectées.

Ils et elles ont développé dans leurs bureaux des projets, théories, concepts, programmes et approches philosophiques ou pratiques d'actions pour une réduction de la pandémie. Mais, une fois les contrats signés et les fonds débloqués; ils et elles ont placés tous leurs beaux projets et autres dans les tiroirs et classeurs perdus de leurs bureaux. Ils et elles débloquent à peine le dixième des fonds allouer, rendant ainsi beaucoup actions inefficaces, comme de l'eau versée sur des ailles de canards. Les restes, ne me demandé où ils passent et partent!

En Afrique, Tout le monde fait dans le VIH/SIDA parce que cela rapporte, ça fait signer des contrats avec les partenaires bilatéraux ou multilatéraux et bien d'autres. Alors qu'on constate d'un côté l'évolution exponentielle du taux de séroprévalence et des malades qui croupissent dans la misère; de l'autre côté on remarque que les responsables d'ONG, les politiques s'offrent des plaisirs tel des véhicules, voyages, buildings et se forgent un statut social avec ce fléau.

Qui aidez-vous à travers cette tricherie? Qui guérissez-vous avec ce jeu? A mon avis; ni les malades, ni vous-même! Car se nourrir de la misère ou de la maladie des autres; c'est être soit même malade. Comprendre l'ampleur de cette maladie à double facette revient à nous poser les questions de savoir si nos ONG et leaders se rendent compte des réels affects de nos peuples? Est ce que nos leaders et ONG vivent les peurs et les ravages du VIH/SIDA dans notre tissu social mais surtout dans notre projet de développement global? Je doute très fort de cette alternative profonde de réflexion.

## **L'Église et le Péch  du SIDA**

Nous avons comme beaucoup de jeune et moins jeune porté notre espoir et esp rance sur le regard proph tique de l' glise dont sa dimension de th rapie pastorale et messianique constituait une r ponse contextuelle, r aliste mais surtout novatrice   la crise de VIH/SIDA en particulier et de la sant  sexuelle en g n ral.

H las, notre d ception fut   son comble, lorsque l' glise en g n ral et certaines communaut s en particulier ont fait du SIDA un p ch  divin sans toute fois se poser la question de la sexualit  humaine et de l'amour comme don de Dieu.

Je fut profond ment troubl , lorsque au cours de la b n diction nuptiale d'une amie; le pasteur apr s avoir rappel  les liens sacr s du mariage; ventait le m rite du dit couple par une carte d'identit  de statut s rologique n gatif; projetant l'image d'exclusion, de mal diction;   l'endroit de ceux et celles qui sont infect s ou affect s.

Si l' glise de Christ rejette et diabolise la maladie; nous pensons qu'il est plus que dangereux. Elle doit apporter une th rapie forte et missionnaire face   ce fl au qui d cime ses fid les et d truit son objectif d'accomplissement du Royaume des Cieux aujourd'hui.

La lecture des multiples gu risons que le Christ entrepris tout au long de sa vie est-elle vraiment enchr  dans nos approches de pri res, de pr dications, d' tudes bibliques et de campagnes m diatiques d' vang lisations. A mon avis, elle est rest  tr s verbeuse car d pourvue de compassion, d' coute mais surtout tourn  vers l'au del . Le Christ a gu ris les hommes et les femmes dans toute leur dimension. Il nous as donn  le pouvoir de le faire en parole mais aussi en acte; non par des spectaculaires campagnes de gu rison mais au travers de l' coute, la compassion et la pr sence.

Comme face au probl me du d veloppement, l' glise   renoncer   la bataille ultime: celle de la gu rison de l'Homme et de tout l'Homme; parce que se concilier avec les gouvernements et partenaires sur la r alit  des trois bateaux sans pour autant se poser r ellement la question de la r alit  du bateau de l'abstinence, de la fid lit  et surtout du port du pr servatif constitue   mon avis une mauvaise compr hension des exigences de gu risons dont-elle est porteuse.

Cette réalité qui attriste nos communautés et paroisses est entretenue par le mythe de la sexualité et la diabolisation de l'amitié. Il sera question de nous apprendre tout en vivant en communauté à comprendre la situation de notre corps, son évolution et ses pulsions.

Il ne s'agit pas fuir ce qui est en nous et ce qui nous constitue mais plutôt les comprendre pour mieux vivre avec eux. Certaines communautés à mon avis, n'ont pas encore réalisées cette importance pour l'avènement de l'Homme et de tout l'Homme méritent à l'image du malade à la piscine de Bethesda (Jean 5,1-16).

Ces trois axes que nous avons présenté, ne sont pas les seuls sur lesquels ils faillent réellement se poser des questions mais ils méritent d'être approfondis. Juste décrier ces réalités néfastes, qui détruisent les espérances de guérison globale de l'Homme et de tout l'Homme serait synonyme de complicité mais surtout d'absence d'alternatives et de propositions fiables de piste de Guérison. Dans cette optique, nous proposons trois champs d'actions qui ont été et sont en expérimentation en Afrique.

### **La Dynamique de Proximité Propre aux Communautés**

Parler de dynamique de proximité, revient à s'approprier la réalité de la maladie en fonction de ses croyances, ses convictions tout en respectant celles des autres. L'expérience du groupe SIDA de l'Aumônerie Protestante Universitaire de Dschang entre 2003 et 2005 témoigne à sa juste valeur de la facilité et de la convivialité d'actions communautaire ciblées dans l'approche, la vision et l'application.

Parler de santé sexuelle et reproductive aux étudiants et aux élèves par les étudiants et élèves de manière libéré et libre produit des résultats incalculables. A mon avis de telles initiatives doivent être encourager.

Parler de VIH/SIDA, c'est parler de la sexualité humaine. La sexualité humaine en temps que don de Dieu devrait dans nos paroisses et communautés être expliquée sans préjugées, sans complexes et sans mythes.

A notre avis une telle communication sera porteuse pour répondre aux questions toujours mystiques et taboues de la sexualité et contribuerait à l'adoption de comportements sexuels responsables. L'expérience de l'Église Christ au Congo (ECC) dont j'ai eu l'opportunité de m'enquérir auprès de ces responsables est très porteuse. Elle doit inspirer d'autres communautés en Afrique et être multiplié partout dans nos pays, en ville comme au village. L'essai d'application qu'on pu entreprendre quelques Églises camerounaises constitue des pistes d'espoirs pour une réponse profonde à la crise du VIH/SIDA.

### **La Lutte contre la Pauvreté**

Aujourd'hui, plus que jamais; parler de VIH/SIDA c'est poser la question importante de la pauvreté et de ses conséquences. Une analyse de la géographie du VIH/SIDA montre que c'est dans les pays les plus pauvres voire très endettés que se trouvent le plus de personnes infectées et affectées. C'est dans ces même pays que le taux de séroprévalence est le plus élevé. Enfin c'est toujours dans ces pays que la politique

de traitement de la maladie crée des discriminations dans la distribution de l'anti-rétroviraux et que la stigmatisation est plus importante.

La lutte contre la Pauvreté nous semble au bout de ses observations, l'axe de combat à prendre très au sérieux dans le cadre de la véritable réponse au VIH/SIDA en Afrique. Nos gouvernements au delà des discours doivent enraciner leurs projets politiques, socio-économiques sur la lutte contre la pauvreté.

Bien organiser, contrôler et orchestrer; cette réponse à elle seule résoudrait au moins la moitié de cette crise et entraînerait avec elle beaucoup d'autres comme celle de l'immigration clandestine, du chômage, du grand banditisme dont souffrent notre continent.

Nos politiques n'ont pas besoin de magies pour savoir que le chômage des jeunes en particulier constitue un réel problème; ajouter à cela, les vieux, qui refusent d'aller à la retraite. Comment créer des emplois lorsqu'elles/ils occupent à perpétuité les postes qui nous reviennent et nous réduisent à des rôles d'éternels ramasseurs de balles et de petits applaudisseurs de matchs qu'elles/ils jouent sur notre dos pour dilapider le patrimoine-héritage qui devrait nous être légué. Il est possible d'inverser la tendance. Nous n'avons plus de choix: nous battre ou périr!

Le projet et processus d'annulation de la dette dont ont bénéficié, bénéficient et bénéficieront certains de nos pays dans le cadre de l'initiative Pays Pauvre Très Endettés (PPTE) doivent être de piste d'utilisation de fond dans le domaine de la santé, de l'éducation, de la formation et de la création de richesse.

### **Plate Forme d'Action de Justice Économique sur le VIH/SIDA**

L'exemple remarquable de programme de «plate forme d'action de justice économique sur le VIH/SIDA» lancé par la *Fédération Universelle des Associations Chrétiennes d'Etudiants* (FUACE Afrique) est à mon avis porteur de sens dans la manière dont nous jeunes devons nous mobiliser pour faire entendre nos voix face aux problèmes, qui nous affectent et assombrissent nos espérances. De façon générale, cette plate forme d'action vise à:

- Montrer comment la pandémie du VIH/SIDA peut être résolue à travers une véritable justice économique dans nos pays. Nous devons interpellier nos mères, pères, grands mères et grandes pères qui non seulement confondent expressément leurs poches avec celle de l'Etat mais pire, les garde à l'étranger pour enrichir les banques étrangères et perpétuer le cycle infernale de la misère.

- Développer des stratégies de plaidoyer et de lobbying auprès de nos gouvernements et institutions. Ces actions ont pour le but d'ouvrir les vannes du dialogue profond et novateur avec nos immobiles leaders dont les seuls soucis sont de déranger notre éducation, de dépouiller nos états de leurs ressources et d'utiliser nos énergies comme armes de destruction.

- Etablir une coalition d'actions de mobilisation nationales des mouvements de jeunes pour une issue positive de justice économique et de VIH/SIDA en Afrique. L'expérience de la bataille menée par l'Association de Défense des Droits des Etudiants du Cameroun (ADDEC) pour une formation universitaire de qualité, doit inspirer la jeunesse partout en Afrique. Mais, de telles actions doivent être intensifiés, coordonnés

et perfectionnés. Elles doivent être concertés, orientés, planifiés et débarrassés des luttes et quêtes individuelles ou claniques de position ou de pouvoir.

Voilà, quelques actions qui bien coordonner et mener apporteraient un sursaut véritable de la jeunesse face aux différentes questions de sociétés, qui nous affectent et infectent.

Ces trois pistes d'actions sont une gouttes d'eau dans la mer mais revêt une importance capitale pour la guérison de nos sociétés malades afin que le futur qui s'assombri en face de nous commence à devenir espérance par nous.

Approfondir ces approches par les structures locales, nationales et internationales de jeunes, par les Églises et ONG, les partenaires et les gouvernements: c'est apporter une réponse juste et durable aux multiples problèmes, qui déséquilibre le projet d'une société vivante.

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David BALL

# Liberation is Near: Discipleship in Lebanon Besieged

*I wrote a song, Wounded Love, after my evacuation from Lebanon last summer during the Israeli invasion. I had worked in the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) office until May 2005, and had spent the last months deepening relationships with Lebanese and Palestinians from all walks of life—from suburbs to refugee camps, ancient churches to student activists. My experience in Lebanon gave me a better understanding of Empire, and was a profound lesson in discipleship.*

## **‘When our Hearts just Ache’: Compassion**

On July 25, 2006, I was forced to leave the country that had welcomed me in flames, and the people I had grown to love in anguish, and it broke my heart. Truly, choosing to leave amidst war was the most difficult decision of my life and one that has challenged me as a Christian, as well.

In the month of July 2006, the swift vengeance of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) crushed Lebanon under its wrath, eagerly supported by Israel’s number one ally, the United States of America (USA).

In response to the Lebanese organization Hezbollah’s capture of two Israeli soldiers, the IAF pummelled the Lebanese people with thirty-three long days of brutal air strikes, several massacres now being investigated as war crimes, and thousands of tiny cluster bombs still killing Lebanese today.

In the name of those two soldiers, the Israeli government killed more than 1200 innocent Lebanese, dumped fifteen thousand tonnes of oil into the sea, flattened the densely populated poor suburbs of Beirut, and ransacked Lebanon’s already weak economy for decades into the future. It also reignited the passions of Israel’s sizeable anti-war movement, which sharply disagrees with the government’s policies of war and occupation.

To some, this will sound like a one-sided account of the war. Others might say that I do not go far enough in condemning it. But I went to Lebanon on a mission, on behalf of my church. Our understanding of mission is one of partnership and solidarity, arising from Jesus Christ’s call to bring good news to the world and all creation (Mark 16,15).

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David BALL is a local secretary with the Student Christian Movement (SCM) of Canada and served with WSCF Middle East during 2005–2006. David is passionate about liberation theology, studied political theory and women’s studies at the University of Victoria, Canada, and is considering ministry in the Anglican church. His website is [www.davidpball.net](http://www.davidpball.net), and his email address is [dpball@gmail.com](mailto:dpball@gmail.com).

MEMO

TO: J. SMITH

FROM: A. P.

SUBJECT:

MEMORANDUM

TO: J. SMITH

FROM: P. C.

SUBJECT:

Solidarity necessarily requires an immersion into the struggles of another people, and out of this arises *compassion*—which literally means “to suffer with” that people in their time of need. Jesus Christ calls us to walk with the oppressed and to turn away from all the enticements of Empire. It is, as Ched MYERS writes, a call to discipleship that is particularly difficult for those of us bestowed with privilege.

“Sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, then come, follow me,” Jesus Christ tells the rich man, only to be rejected because he is blinded by attachment to wealth (Matthew 19,16–22).

“Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s,” Jesus Christ commands (Luke 20,20–26). Do not get sucked into the imperial dream or its illusory benefits. “And to God the things that are God’s.” For every challenge to repent of Empire, there is always an invitation to follow God’s path of abundant life.

When the Israeli invasion first began in mid-July 2006, we witnessed the mounting civilian death toll, saw pictures of maimed and dismembered children, and heard horror stories from our friends in the suburbs and South who were being severely traumatized.

### **‘When the Bombs Rain Down’: Witness**

As refugees flooded my mostly-Muslim neighbourhood (one-quarter of the Lebanese population was displaced from their homes during the conflict), I struggled with how I should respond to all these events.

With continuing air strikes and rising suspicion of foreigners, I was too afraid to leave my house. So, when several church friends came to live with me, we prayed every night for an end to the invasion and for peace.

To pray like this, one cannot be neutral. Certainly, we prayed for the Israeli civilians terrified of Hezbollah missile attacks south of the border. But to truly name suffering means to recognize the vast disproportion of a modern, technologically advanced, massively U.S.-funded military pummelling a guerrilla-style army in civilian areas.

One cannot remain purely neutral without doing injustice to the sheer helplessness of the Lebanese population. So we prayed. By Sunday, the port near our church was bombed, and we invited those left of our congregation to our apartment.

We read the story of Jesus Christ’s disciples being nearly drowned when a storm threatened to sink their boat. They angrily demand why He does not seem to care. Jesus Christ calms the storm, but also challenges their lack of faith (Mark 4,35–41).

We set up a tiny little model of that boat in the centre of our prayer circle. Writing our fears and petitions to God on paper, we placed them prayerfully into the boat and handed them over to God.

As we did this, the earth trembled with explosions not far away, and yet strangely we did not feel afraid. Confronted with the reality of injustice and fear that makes our hands tremble for days on end, I grappled with a number of questions during that time.

The first question was whether it was enough to pray. One night, I truly realized the possibility of dying with all my friends in Lebanon. Despite my great fears, the reality of death had not sunk in.

An Israeli commander had stated that “nowhere in Lebanon is safe.” Shiite and Sunni family friends were urging me to stay with them during their ordeal, but their regions (and the roads to them) were being bombed all night long.

It would not have been safe to go at all. I was suddenly confronted with the gap between my call to follow Jesus Christ (which is my mission) and my will to survive (which is my fear).

My very best friend implored me to be with her family, despite the fact that their Shiite village supported Hezbollah’s resistance and therefore would no doubt be targeted. When I questioned the safety of their village, her reply truly challenged me: “Of course it is safe—we are here together.”

### **‘When all Hope Seems Gone’: Solidarity**

Solidarity is not about certainty, or agreeing with everything about another. Rather, it is overcoming the border between yourself and those you are taught are less human, less safe, less worthy of your love.

It is also about facing and overcoming your fears. I discovered that, upon accepting the possibility of death, I had become less afraid and more able to help the refugees on the streets and hear their stories.

The borders we erect have created a global Empire based on fear, exploitation, lies, and extreme violence. This violence often manifests itself in things like the invasion of Iraq for its oil, or “emergency” U.S. weapons shipments to Israel during its Lebanon campaign.

Connected to this, there are also the killings of hundreds of human rights and church workers in the Philippines, because they are questioning our economic idols; for example, former SCM leader Roderick ASPILI was assassinated in November 2006 for his labour organizing and SCM work.

The violence is also hidden in the forms of grinding poverty, racism, AIDS, spiritual emptiness, and the lies that we who are privileged tell ourselves about our power. Jesus Christ died on the cross. He died a hundred times this week in Iraq. He will die, but He will rise again and again in his suffering people.

According to the Eucharistic liturgy, Jesus Christ’s death was “freely accepted.” But those crushed by the Empire today—the linking of economic, political and cultural powers into a system of domination and single logic of rule that destroys life—did not freely choose their death. Still death is not the final word.

In the words of Guatemalan poet Julia ESQUIVEL: “The Word awoke us from the lethargy, which was stealing all our Hope.” What is stealing our hope today? What is this “lethargy,” this spiritual and political apathy that keeps us bound in silence?

Ched MYERS reminds us that apathy comes from *a-pathos*—feelinglessness—and too often our silence at injustice is driven by a lack of feeling, or perhaps more accurately, a *fear* of feelings like despair, rage, vengeance and total loss, all of which are very understandable human responses to violence.

## ‘Our Fears so Deep’: Courage

I have seen war first-hand, if only for two weeks. How are we Christians to respond? It is not enough, in my view, to merely oppose war, or to advocate against particular wars. We must be willing also to face the storm swamping our boat and hold our heads high.

Times will surely come when we, those of us with privilege because of location, class, gender, or race, will lose the luxury to dissent without being assassinated or imprisoned like our sisters and brothers around the world.

At that time, will we still be followers of Him—or will we deny him like the Apostle Peter in the palace courtyard? The toughest challenge of Jesus Christ is not to which ethics or morality we follow, or what we say and do; the real struggle is in how much we are willing to risk our security, our comfort, even our lives, at the “time of trial” (Luke 11,4; 22,46).

In the words of Dietrich BONHOEFFER (*Letters and Papers from Prison*, 17), who was hanged by German Nazis for his resistance to Adolf HITLER:

“We have become increasingly familiar with the thought of death. We feel that we really belong to death already, and that every new day is a miracle. We still love life. We should like death to come to us, not accidentally or suddenly through some trivial course, but in the fullness of life and with everything at stake.”

## ‘Then the Morning Comes’: Prayer

My priest, Rev. Cathy CAMPBELL, spoke radically of hope this Advent season. Hope is not at all easy, she said, when we see dark clouds forming around us, and our ecological and social systems are collapsing: “Distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves” (Luke 21,25).

In fact, hope has nothing to do with optimism, she added. The Empire’s accelerated pace is destroying everything sacred, including the fabric of life itself. Hope is uncertain; hope is holding onto courage and the fullness and joy of life in such times: “Stand upright and hold your heads high, because your liberation is near” (Luke 21,28). This is the same “fullness of life” of which Dietrich BONHOEFFER writes—“with everything at stake.”

Hope is resisting with all our heart the temptations and seductions of power. It is about holding our heads high and walking forward in a time of darkness. As it was prophesied at Jesus Christ’s birth: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Luke 1,79).

This light—which is liberation—is beyond our grasp, but becomes possible with faith. Recalling the words of Archbishop Oscar ROMERO, who was assassinated by U.S.-trained killers in El Salvador for his prophetic opposition to Empire, the results of our efforts are beyond our reach: “We are prophets of a future not our own.”

I remember one terrifying night of air strikes and bombings in Beirut. As the sun began to rise, the bombings ceased and there was a great silence. And then a gentle song wove through the streets: *Allahu akbar!* God is greater!—the daily call to prayer for Muslims.

Lights turned on. Determined people emerged onto the fearful streets and walked to their holy places. One Muslim told me he rarely goes to mosque; but during the war, he was there every day, no matter what was at stake.

God is indeed greater.

#### Suggested Reading

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**David BALL**

## **Wounded Love**

When our hearts just ache with a wounded love  
And our spirit breaks then it is enough  
To let the morning come and call us to prayer  
In our brokenness, Lord, You're always there.

When the bombs rain down, pounding fists into the Earth  
With the skies ablaze and loved ones underneath  
Then the morning comes and calls us to prayer  
In the rubble and the pain, Lord, You're always there.

When all hope seems gone and our victories few  
In the healing work that you call us to  
Then the morning comes and calls us to prayer  
In our shattered hopes and dreams, Lord, You're always there.

When the nights are long and we cannot sleep,  
Nightmares realized and our fears so deep  
Then the morning comes and calls us to prayer  
In the loss of certainty, Lord, You're always there.

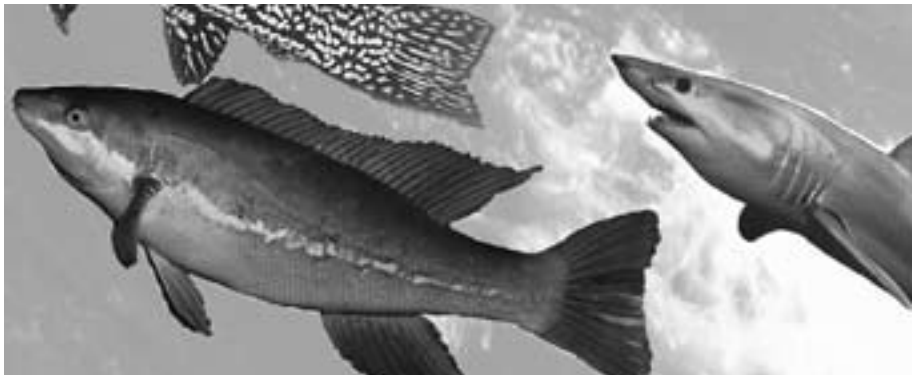
We can build our empire and our towers higher  
We can try to turn our face from the raging fire  
But those of us who turn to You have a higher call  
We who follow in Your path love not guarded walls.

When our leaders plot and ignore the poor  
Set our world ablaze seeking human power  
Then the morning comes and calls us to prayer  
In the power of the weak, Lord, You're always there.

When our ears refuse to hear You calling  
And our eyes shut tight to war's sinful folly  
Then the morning comes and calls us to prayer  
In our frightful ignorance, Lord, You're always there.

When our hands are closed around what we can grasp  
Our own mortal lives that so quickly pass  
Then the morning comes and calls us to prayer  
In the letting go, Lord, You're always there.

When we just let go and live into You  
Let love flow through us and our hearts be true  
We let the morning come and call us to prayer  
In the glory of our God, Who is always there.



**David BALL**

## **Guilt for Leaving Lebanon in Flames**

I hold my cowardice up,  
but it just mocks me  
like a smiling mask.

I escaped with my life  
and in the running, I lost it  
somewhere along the way.

Remember your clenched teeth  
when the thud of lives  
crushed just down the road  
took the time to wake you up?

Remember the way  
the blood pumped faster  
through your heart at the roar  
of the poison-fire vultures overhead?

That was not real fear,  
not like they know it,  
that was just not knowing,  
that was just not wanting to die,  
that was just an instinct,  
to carry on with the dying of everyday.

What good will it do to a person  
to keep her or his life?  
No, what good is guilt?

Why do I let it mock me so  
like smiling masks,  
when it, as cowardly as I,  
is the true life-taker?

What good will it do to a person?  
No, there is no good in war,  
not a game but real bodies scarred,  
and spilled from trucks, windows, schools.

No way my rage would fit,  
if I simply looked at it  
and saw what it really sought.

What good would it do? What?  
That I should write now  
and lament for leaving  
and, left, silently obey  
stern warnings of 'not now'  
and 'wait a bit' and  
'do not rage at all.'  
(If you know what is good for you;  
and we do.)

Know, that is,  
we know the thought behind the mask,  
know that what you felt was in no way real,  
they simply do not exist:  
the fearful crinkle in his voice,  
the pulse of my quickening heart,  
the frustrated questions I could never answer,  
the gasp for breath in the night.

If it was not a dream,  
it might have been a memo  
dug from the hollow files of chosen death,  
where all you can do is turn it over  
and scratch a few futile cries  
into its unfeeling blank silent surface.

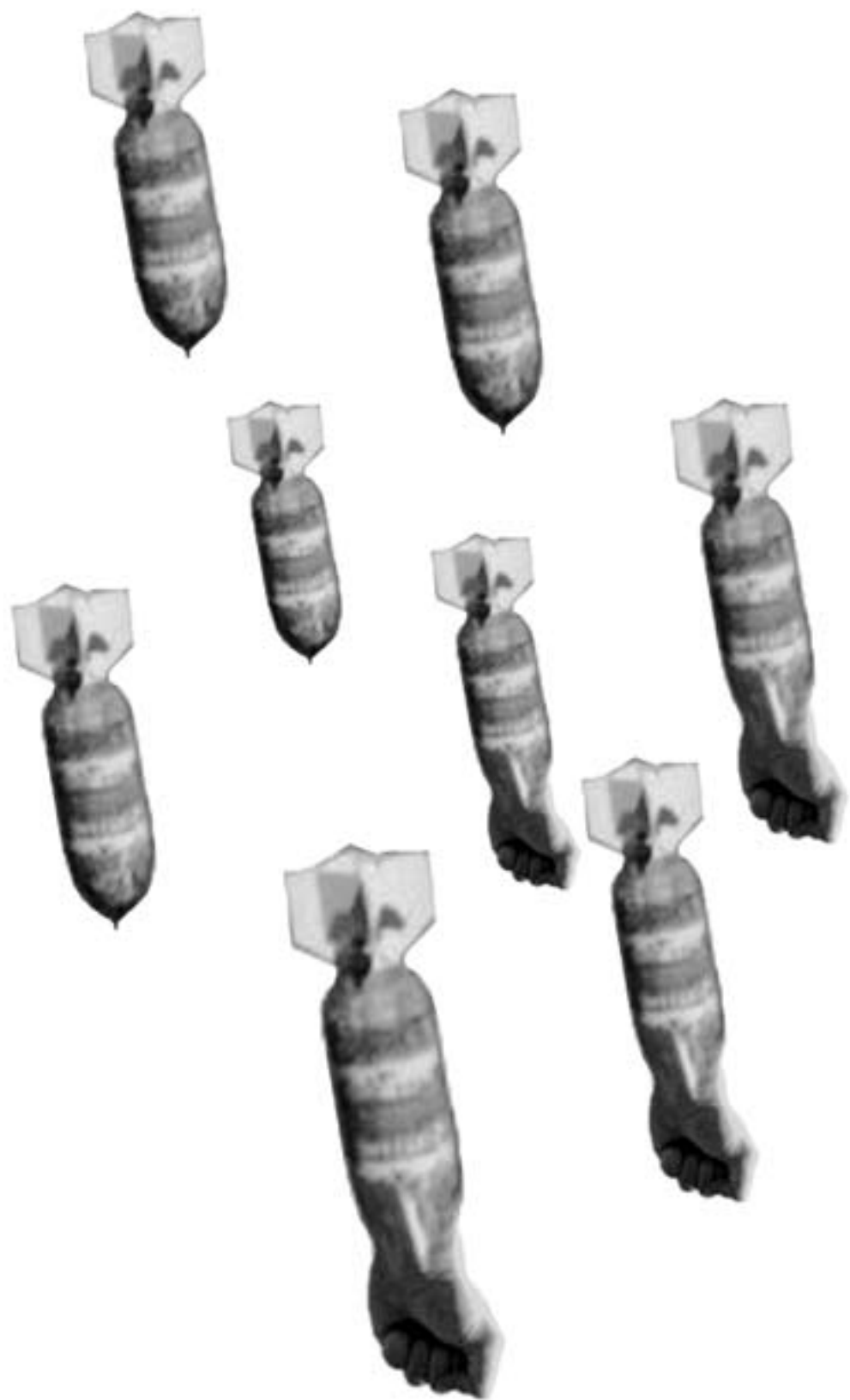
Unread.

A memo knew once the suffering of a tree, but ...  
what good? A memo cannot now understand any  
suffering  
from its cubicle tack-board in some lifeless tower.  
Not of death vultures beyond the clouds,  
not the smell of fresh-caught fish from a river,  
not children, alone or guilt.

A memo is really death.  
A memo is how we live without living.  
A memo is an opiate.  
A bureaucrat's initiate,  
a most carefully conceived fate  
that wipes my tears with 'not now'  
and 'wait a bit' and 'do not rage at all'.  
It is simply not convenient, you see?

I cannot help but rage and seethe and plot  
but I end up waiting,  
wishing I could love again.

And thank you for your patience with me  
your words understood my hatred,  
you spoke gently, without judgement,  
you said that I can love, and do,  
even through my rage.



# Día Universal de Oración por los Estudiantes (DUOE) 2006 Imperio y Basilea

## 1. Bienvenida y Saludo de la Paz

En el nombre de Dios. *Amén.*

La paz de Cristo sea siempre con ustedes. *Y también contigo.*

Jesucristo es nuestra paz. *Vivamos en su amor.*

## 2. Invocación (por Brian WREN)

Amor viviente, comienzo y fin, quien nos da la comida y la bebida, la ropa y el abrigo, el amor y la esperanza: la vida en su plenitud: *Te alabamos y adoramos.*

Jesucristo, sabiduría y palabra; amante de los parias, amigo de los pobres; uno de nosotros pero uno con Dios; crucificado y resucitado: vida en medio de la muerte: *Te alabamos y adoramos.*

Esíritu Santo, tormenta y aliento de vida; quien construye puentes, abre nuestros ojos y despierta a los oprimidos; invisible e inesperado, indomable energía de la vida: *Te alabamos y adoramos.*

Santa Trinidad, por siempre una, cuya naturaleza es comunidad: origen de toda generosidad, en quien amamos y conocemos a nuestro prójimo: vida en su plenitud, quien renueva todas las cosas: *Te alabamos y adoramos.*

## 3. Confesión (por Jan BERRY)

Dios que nos inundas con Tu amor como una madre velando las necesidades de su familia, cuidando a todos sus hijos con ternura. *Kyrie eleison.*

Perdónanos cuando, como niños malcriados, esperamos Tu generosidad como un derecho, o lo aprisionamos posesivamente para nosotros mismos. *Kyrie eleison.*

Perdónanos cuando somos ciegos a la injusticia de nuestro mundo y nuestra comunidad. *Kyrie eleison.*

Perdónanos cuando vemos injusticia y elegimos no hacer nada. *Kyrie eleison.*

Perdona nuestra complicidad con los sistemas que oprimen y destruyen a Tu pueblo y Tu creación. *Kyrie eleison.*

Perdona nuestra falta de fe en Ti, en Tu pueblo, en nosotros y en la posibilidad del cambio. *Kyrie eleison.*



Nos volvemos ante Ti, O Dios; reuñamos al mal; reclamamos tu amor; elejimos ser renovados. Nos volvemos ante Tí buscando la gracia de perdonar y sabernos perdonados. *Amen.*

#### **4. Lectura del Antiguo y Nuevo Testamento**

Escuchen lo que el Espíritu le está diciendo a la Iglesia. *Demos gracias a Dios.*

#### **5. Declaración de Fe (por Yong Ting Jin)**

Creemos en Jesucristo, nuestro Salvador y liberador; Expresión del amor salvífico de Dios: La marca de la humanidad, fuente de valor, poder y amor; Dios de Dios, luz de luz, base de nuestra humanidad.

Creemos que Dios vive en los tugurios, vive en los hogares y en los corazones quebrantados, sufre nuestra soledad y nuestra impotencia.

Creemos que mediante la muerte y resurrección Dios da la vida, el orgullo y la dignidad; propone el contexto de nuestra lucha, promete la liberación al opresor y al oprimido, esperanza para quienes desesperan y vista a los ciegos.

Creemos en la actividad del Espíritu Santo quien reanima nuestra alma decadente, resucita nuestros espíritus derrotados, renueva nuestra esperanza de integridad y nos recuerda nuestra responsabilidad de hacer realidad el Nuevo orden de Dios aquí y ahora. *Amén.*

#### **6. Oraciones del Pueblo (por Lara BLACKWOOD)**

Oramos, Oh Dios, buscando un mayor conocimiento de la unión de Jesucristo con Su Iglesia, y Su voluntad para ella, y la acción renovadora de Tu Espíritu Santo para que Tu Iglesia sea una. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos para que entre los cristianos de todo el mundo se despierte el anhelo de reunirse, trabajar, testificar y adorarte unidos. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por una mayor cooperación entre todas las ramas de la Iglesia de Jesucristo, para que en nuestra unidad podamos trabajar por la justicia tanto fuera como dentro del Imperio. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por el trabajo realizado por la Federación Universal de Movimientos Estudiantiles Cristianos (FUMEC), que la Federación pueda unir a los estudiantes Cristianos en misión, servicio, estudio y justicia para una plena expresión de lo que significa ser la Iglesia. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por las representaciones regionales de la Federación Universal de Movimientos Estudiantiles Cristianos (FUMEC) y sus Movimientos Estudiantiles Cristianos (MEC) locales. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por África. Que esta vela represente la luz de Dios presente en el trabajo de la Región Africana. Bendice su labor, oh Dios. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por Asia y el Pacífico. Que esta vela represente la luz de Dios presente en el trabajo de la Región del Asia-Pacífico. Bendice su labor, oh Dios. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por Europa. Que esta vela represente la luz de Dios presente en el trabajo de la Región Europea. Bendice su labor, oh Dios. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por América Latina y el Caribe. Que esta vela represente la luz de Dios presente en el trabajo de la región Latinoamericana-Caribeña. Bendice su labor, oh Dios. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por el Medio Oriente. Que esta vela represente la luz de Dios presente en el trabajo de la región de Medio Oriente. Bendice su labor, oh Dios. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por Norteamérica. Que esta vela represente la luz de Dios presente en el trabajo de la región Norteamericana. Bendice su labor, oh Dios. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

Oramos por el movimiento ecuménico y por todos los que sufren, oran y luchan en la causa por la unidad y la justicia: que todos estos esfuerzos produzcan frutos para el honor y la gloria de Tu Santo nombre. Espíritu unificador: *Escucha nuestra oración.*

## 7. Oración (por Jim COTTER)

Oramos por una visión renovada, que podamos encontrar alternativas para el Imperio y la injusticia. Renueva nuestro compromiso y desafía nuestras presuposiciones al orar juntos la oración que Jesucristo nos enseñó, de una manera nueva:

¡Espíritu Eterno, Creador de la tierra, quien carga el dolor, dador de la vida fuente de todo lo que es y será, Madre y Padre de todos nosotros, amante Dios en quien el cielo existe!

¡Que la santificación de Tu nombre sea eco en todo el universo! ¡Que el camino de Tu justicia sea seguido por todas las naciones del mundo! ¡Que Tu santa voluntad sea hecha por todos los seres creados! ¡Que Tu república de paz y libertad sostenga nuestra esperanza y se haga realidad en la tierra!

Con el pan que necesitamos para hoy, aliméntanos. En las heridas que absorbemos unos de los otros, perdónanos. En tiempos de tentación y prueba, fortalécenos. De las luchas demasiado duras para superar, excúsanos. De la garra de todo lo que es malvado, libéranos.

Porque Tu reinas en la Gloria del poder que es el amor, ahora y por siempre. *Amén.*

## 8. Envío (Bendición del Libro de Oración Común)

Salgan al mundo en paz, sean valientes, afirmense con todo lo bueno, a nadie hagan mal por mal, fortalezcan a los que desfallecen, apoyen a los débiles, ayuden a los afligidos, honren a todas las personas, y que la bendición de Dios nuestro Creador, Liberador y Sostén esté con nosotros ahora y siempre. *Amén.*

(Traducido al Español por Patricia LENTON DE DICKIN.)

# Journée Mondiale de Prière des Étudiants (JMPÉ) 2006 Empire et Basileia

## 1. Accueil et Échange de Signes de Paix

Au nom de notre Dieu. *Amen.*

La paix du Jésus Christ soit toujours avec vous. *Et aussi avec toi.*

Le Jésus Christ est notre paix. *Vivons dans son amour.*

## 2. Invocation (par Brian WREN)

Toi, l'amour incarné, le commencement et la fin, le dispensateur de ce qui nourrit et désaltère, de ce qui revêt et réchauffe, de l'amour et de l'espérance: la vie dans toute son excellence: *Nous Te louons et nous T'adorons.*

Jésus Christ, Sagesse et Parole; Toi qui aimes ceux que l'on exclut, l'ami des pauvres; Toi qui es l'un de nous et pourtant un avec Dieu; Toi le crucifié et le ressuscité: la vie au milieu de la mort: *Nous Te louons et nous T'adorons.*

Esprit Saint, onde et souffle d'amour; Toi qui construis des ponts, qui ouvres les yeux des aveugles, qui tires les opprimés de leur sommeil, Toi qu'on ne voit pas, à qui on ne s'attend pas, indomptable énergie vitale: *Nous Te louons et nous T'adorons.*

Sainte Trinité, éternellement une, dont l'essence est communion; source de tout partage, par qui nous aimons, par qui nous rencontrons et connaissons notre prochain: Toi la vie dans toute sa plénitude, Toi qui fais toutes choses nouvelles: *Nous Te louons et nous T'adorons.*

## 3. Confession des Péchés (par Jan BERRY)

Notre Dieu, Tu nous couvres de Ton amour comme une mère qui prend soin de sa famille et qui serre dans ses bras tous ses enfants avec tendresse. *Kyrie eleison.*

Pardonne-nous lorsque, tels des enfants gâtés, nous considérons que ta générosité est un dû, ou lorsque nous l'accaparons à notre seul profit. *Kyrie eleison.*



Pardonne-nous lorsque nous fermons les yeux sur l'injustice dans le monde et autour de nous. *Kyrie eleison.*

Pardonne-nous lorsque nous voyons l'injustice et que nous choisissons de ne rien faire. *Kyrie eleison.*

Pardonne-nous d'être complices de systèmes qui oppriment et détruisent Ton peuple et Ta création. *Kyrie eleison.*

Pardonne-nous de manquer de foi en Toi, en Ton peuple, en nous-mêmes et dans les possibilités de transformation. *Kyrie eleison.*

Nous nous tournons vers Toi, notre Dieu; nous renonçons au mal; nous proclamons Ton amour; nous choisissons d'être réunis en un seul corps. Nous comptons sur Toi, sur Ta grâce pour nous accorder le pardon et pour nous savoir pardonnés. *Amen.*

#### **4. Lecture des Ecritures Hébraïques et du Nouveau Testament**

Ecoutez ce que l'Esprit dit à l'Eglise. *Grâces soient rendues à Dieu.*

#### **5. Affirmation de la Foi (par Yong Ting Jin)**

Nous croyons en Jésus Christ, notre sauveur et notre libérateur; il est l'expression de l'amour de Dieu qui nous a rachetés: la marque de l'humanité, la source du courage, de la force, de l'amour; Dieu venu de Dieu, lumière issue de la lumière, fondement de notre humanité.

Nous croyons que Dieu habite dans les taudis, qu'il vit dans les foyers détruits et les cœurs brisés, qu'il partage notre solitude et notre impuissance.

Nous croyons que, par la mort et la résurrection, Dieu donne la vie, la fierté, la dignité; qu'il crée le contexte de notre lutte, qu'il promet la libération à l'opresseur comme à l'opprimé, l'espérance à ceux qui désespèrent, la vue aux aveugles.

Nous croyons que l'Esprit Saint agit, Il fait revivre nos âmes corrompues, Il ressuscite nos esprits abattus, Il renouvelle notre espérance d'intégrité et nous rappelle que nous sommes chargés d'ouvrir la voie ici et maintenant à l'ordre nouveau que Dieu veut. *Amen.*

#### **6. Prières de l'Assemblée (par Lara BLACKWOOD)**

Notre Dieu, nous Te prions afin de mieux comprendre l'union du Jésus Christ avec son Eglise, ainsi que sa volonté à son égard, et pour le renouveau qu'apporte Ton Esprit Saint afin que ton Eglise soit une. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour que se réveille chez les chrétiens du monde entier le désir de se retrouver, d'agir, de témoigner et d'adorer tous ensemble. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour que toutes les parties de l'Eglise du Jésus Christ collaborent mieux ensemble afin que, par notre unité, nous puissions œuvrer en faveur de la justice, aussi bien en dehors de l'Empire que dans son sein. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour l'action de la Fédération Universelle des Associations Chrésiennes d'Étudiants (FUACE) afin que celle-ci puisse rassembler les étudiants chrétiens en vue de la mission, du service, de l'étude et de la justice pour mieux exprimer ce que signifie être l'Eglise. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour les manifestations régionales de la Fédération Universelle des Associations Chrésiennes d'Étudiants (FUACE) et pour les Mouvements nationaux d'Étudiants Chrésiennes (MÉC). Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour l'Afrique. Que ce cierge soit signe de la lumière de Dieu présente dans le travail de la région Afrique. Bénis son travail, notre Dieu. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour l'Asie et pour le Pacifique. Que ce cierge soit signe de la lumière de Dieu présente dans le travail de la région Asie-Pacifique. Bénis son travail, notre Dieu. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour l'Europe. Que ce cierge soit signe de la lumière de Dieu présente dans le travail de la région Europe. Bénis son travail, notre Dieu. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour l'Amérique Latine et les Caraïbes. Que ce cierge soit signe de la lumière de Dieu présente dans le travail de la région Amérique Latine et Caraïbes. Bénis son travail, notre Dieu. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour le Moyen-Orient. Que ce cierge soit signe de la lumière de Dieu présente dans le travail de la région du Moyen-Orient. Bénis son travail, notre Dieu. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour l'Amérique du Nord. Que ce cierge soit signe de la lumière de Dieu présente dans le travail de la région Amérique du Nord. Bénis son travail, notre Dieu. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

Nous Te prions pour le mouvement œcuménique et pour tous ceux et toutes celles qui souffrent, qui prient et qui peinent pour la cause de l'unité et de la justice: que tous ces efforts portent du fruit à l'honneur et à la gloire de Ton saint nom. Esprit d'unité: *Entends notre prière.*

## **7. Oraison Dominicale (par Jim COTTER)**

Nous Te prions de renouveler nos idées afin que nous trouvions comment remplacer par autre chose l'Empire et l'injustice. Renouvelle notre engagement et remets en question nos idées préconçues alors que nous T'adressons en des termes nouveaux la prière que Jésus Christ nous a apprise:

Esprit éternel, Toi qui as créé la terre, qui portes la souffrance et donnes la vie, source de tout ce qui est et de ce qui sera, notre Mère et notre Père à tous et à toutes, Dieu d'amour en qui est le ciel!

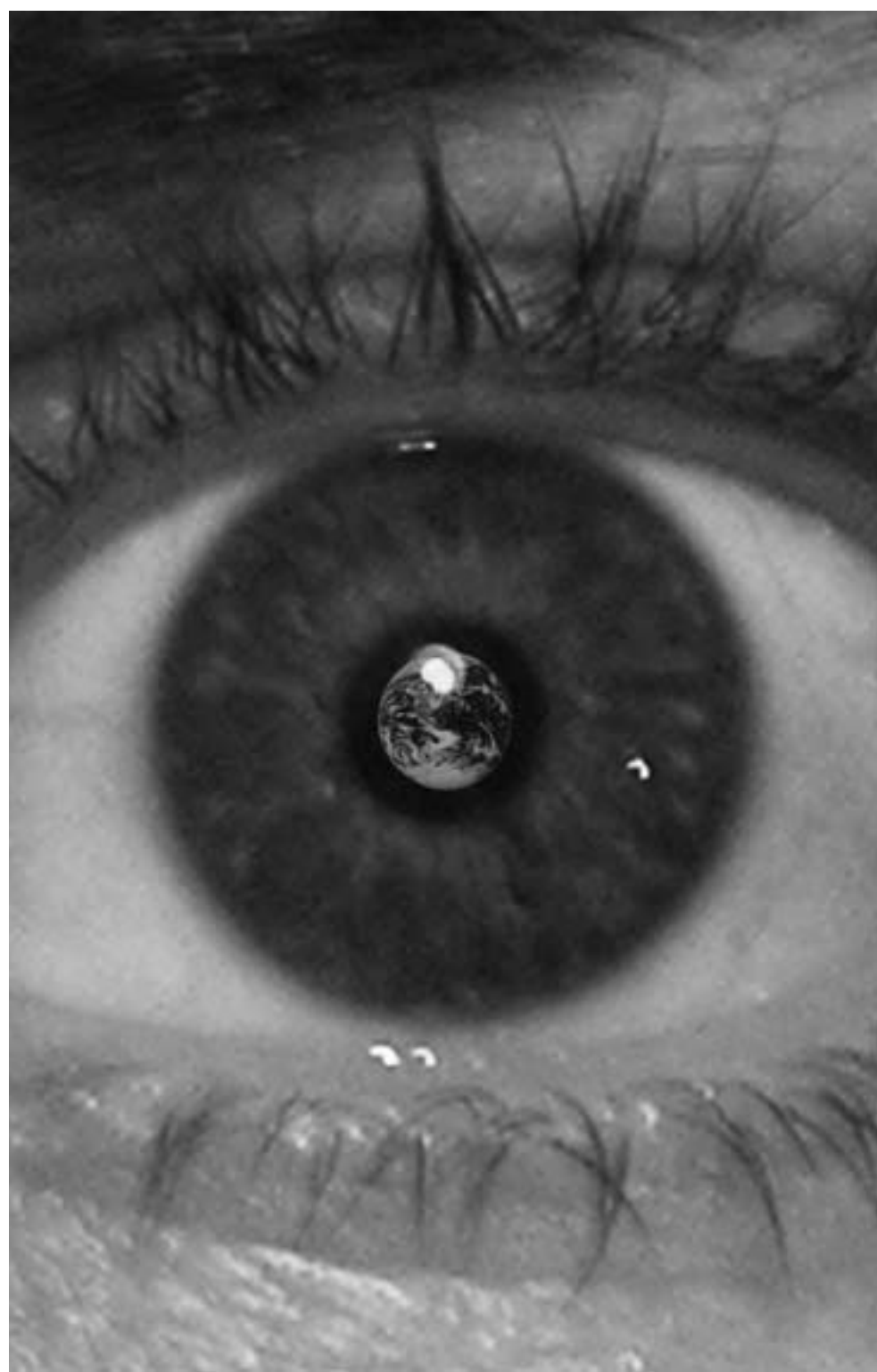
Que la sanctification de Ton nom retentisse dans l'univers entier! Que les voies de Ta justice soient suivies par les peuples du monde! Que Ta volonté céleste soit faite par tous les êtres créés! Que Ta communauté de paix et de liberté soutienne notre espérance et vienne sur la terre.

Avec le pain dont nous avons besoin pour aujourd'hui, nourris-nous. Pour les coups que nous recevons les uns des autres, pardonne-nous. Dans les moments de tentation et d'épreuve, fortifie-nous. Face aux épreuves trop dures à supporter, épargne-nous. Des griffes de tout mal, libère-nous.

Car Tu règues dans la gloire et la puissance qui est l'amour, maintenant et à jamais. *Amen.*

## **8. Envoi (Book of Common Prayer)**

Allez en paix dans le monde, ayez bon courage, tenez ferme ce qui est bon, ne rendez à personne le mal pour le mal, fortifiez ceux qui hésitent, soutenez les faibles, aidez les affligés, honorez chacun, et que la bénédiction de Dieu, notre créateur, notre libérateur et notre appui, soit avec nous maintenant et à jamais. *Amen.*



# Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) 2006 Empire and Basileia

## 1. Welcome and Sharing Peace

In the name of God. *Amen.*

The peace of Jesus Christ be always with you. *And also with you.*

Jesus Christ is our peace. *Let us live in his love.*

## 2. Invocation (by Brian WREN)

Living Love, beginning and end, giver of food and drink, clothing and warmth, love and hope: life in all its goodness: *We praise and adore You.*

Jesus Christ, wisdom and word; lover of outcasts, friend of the poor; one of us yet one with God; crucified and risen: life in the midst of death: *We praise and adore You.*

Holy Spirit, storm and breath of love; bridge-builder, eye-opener, waker of the oppressed; unseen and unexpected, untameable energy of life: *We praise and adore You.*

Holy Trinity, forever one, Whose nature is community; source of all sharing, in Whom we love, and meet, and know our neighbour; life in all its fullness, making all things new: *We praise and adore You.*

## 3. Confession (by Jan BERRY)

God, You heap Your love upon us like a mother providing for her family's needs, embracing all her children with tenderness. *Kyrie eleison.*

Forgive us when, like spoilt children, we treat Your generosity as our right, or we hug it possessively to ourselves. *Kyrie eleison.*

Forgive us when we are blind to the injustice in our world and community. *Kyrie eleison.*

Forgive us when we see injustice and choose to do nothing. *Kyrie eleison.*

Forgive our complicity with systems that oppress and destroy your people and Your creation. *Kyrie eleison.*

Forgive our lack of faith in You, in Your people, in ourselves and in the possibilities for change. *Kyrie eleison.*

We turn to You, O God; we renounce evil; we claim Your love; we choose to be made whole. We look to You for grace to offer forgiveness, and to know ourselves forgiven. *Amen.*

#### 4. Reading from the Old and New Testaments

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. *Thanks be to God.*

#### 5. Affirmation of Faith (by Yong Ting Jin)

We believe in Jesus Christ, our saviour and liberator; the expression of God's redeeming love; the mark of humanness, source of courage, power and love; God of God, light of light; ground of our humanity.

We believe that God resides in slums; lives in broken homes and hearts; suffers our loneliness and powerlessness.

We believe that through death and resurrection God gives life, pride and dignity; provides the context of our struggle; promises liberation to the oppressor and the oppressed; hope to those in despair, vision to the blind.

We believe in the activity of the Holy Spirit, Who revives our decaying soul; resurrects our defeated spirits; renews our hope of wholeness, and reminds us of our responsibility in ushering in God's new order here and now. *Amen.*

#### 6. Prayers of the People (by Lara Blackwood)

We pray, O God, for a deeper understanding of Christ's union with his Church, and his will for it, and for the renewing action of Your Holy Spirit so that Your Church may be one. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for the awakening of a desire of Christians throughout the world to meet together, to work and witness and worship together. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for a better cooperation among all branches of Christ's Church, so that in our unity we may work for justice both outside and within the Empire. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for the work done by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), that the Federation may bring Christian students together in dialogue, mission, service, study, justice and discipleship for a fuller expression of what it means to be the Church. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for the regional and subregional manifestations of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), and their national Student Christian Movements (SCMs). Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for *Africa*: May this candle represent the light of God present in the work of the African Region. Bless their work, O God. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for *Asia* and the *Pacific*: May this candle represent the light of God present in the work of the Asia-Pacific Region. Bless their work, O God. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for *Europe*: May this candle represent the light of God present

in the work of the European Region. Bless their work, O God. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for *Latin America* and the *Caribbean*: May this candle represent the light of God present in the work of the Latin America and Caribbean Region. Bless their work, O God. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for the *Middle East*: May this candle represent the light of God present in the work of the Middle East Region. Bless their work, O God. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for *North America*. May this candle represent the light of God present in the work of the North American Region. Bless their work, O God. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

We pray for the ecumenical movement and for all who suffer, pray and toil in the cause of unity and justice: that all these efforts may bear good fruits to the honour and glory of Your most holy name. Uniting Spirit: *Hear our prayer.*

## **7. Prayer of Jesus Christ (by Jim COTTER)**

We pray for fresh insight that we might find alternatives to Empire and injustice. Renew our commitment and challenge our assumptions as we pray the prayer Jesus Christ taught us, in a new way:

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver; Source of all that is and that shall be; Mother and Father of us all; Loving God in Whom is Heaven!

The hallowing of Your name echo through the Universe. The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world. Your heavenly will be done by all created beings. Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on Earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you Reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **8. Sending out (from Book of Common Prayer)**

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all people; and may the blessing of God our Creator, Liberator and Sustainer be with us now and always. *Amen.*