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# TSE BULLETIN

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A Publication of  
**THEOLOGICAL  
STUDENTS  
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The Yasukuni Shrine issue makes Japanese Christians realize how shallow democracy really is in Japan. Religious freedom and separation of religion and state are ideas fostered by democracy. To take away spiritual freedom is to deprive of all freedom. In 1971, some in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stated, "Japan has become very prosperous economically, but as a result has lost its humanity; materialistically prosperous but spiritually and morally poor. The way to return to this humanity is to champion the Yasukuni Shrine." This is clearly a case of politics reaching its hands into personal and spiritual affairs which are out of its sphere of concern.

Japanese Christians fear the loss of religious freedom which has been enjoyed since the destruction of the military regime

in 1945. We believe that in facing the Yasukuni Shrine issue we are engaged in spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil (Eph. 6:15), who are seeking to frustrate the task of evangelization of Japan and the world. We desperately need the prayers of our brothers and sisters worldwide, as we struggle to find the most appropriate way to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ here in Japan. Please pray that we will be uncompromisingly faithful to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and that we will not repeat the mistakes of the past, as we endeavor to bear witness to our Lord in Japan today!

**For the Sake of the Kingdom,  
Yoshiaki Yui**

# **The Pain of the North American Heart: Reflections on A Recent Ecumenical Student Gathering**

**by Donald Persons**

We need to reflect long and hard about the events of the last several months in which U.S. young adults and theological students gathered to better discern their role in the U.S. ecumenical movement. The young adults & students met in the context of the WCC and NCCC/USA national conference in Cleveland, OH, challenging U.S. Christians to "Embrace the World," and calling for "greater participation of a new generation of ecumenical leaders."

Two objectives were accomplished in the students' meeting. First, those in attendance were exposed to the ecumenical commitment and work of leaders of the World Council of Churches and of U.S. churches involved in the National Council of Churches of Christ. Second, we witnessed a "phoenix event" as the planning committee of the Christian Theological Students Consortium of the U.S. (CTSCUS) handed over its responsibilities to a newly formed Ecumenical Network of Theological Students (ENTS). The purpose of ENTS was suggested only in the closing worship: to foster dialogue among Christian theological students and theologically-engaged persons in the U.S. This is to be accomplished through a newsletter, pursuit of ecumenical academic forums and the continued presence of a WCC staff resource person.

At the same time, there was little discussion of a student role in ecumenism or mission in North America. Issues derived from the addition of "young adults" to the concerns of CTSCUS were poorly addressed. There was no talk about what we experience locally as young adults/theological students. Our rich ecclesial and theological diversity was not really tapped. So it becomes obvious why it was so difficult for the student assembly to arrive at a concrete purpose for its new creation, ENTS. Though the appeal for wider regional participation may first appear wanting, there is, nevertheless, a great significance in the presence of students at the meeting of the WCC and the NCCC/USA with implications for ecumenical aims to "Embrace the World." This article will attempt to draw them out.

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## **The Participation**

The participants gathered from across the country in response to a call from the Consortium of Theological Students of the U.S., the movement originating in the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC, *Gathered for Life*, p. 16). Most came from various seminaries and Bible schools and cut across a vast array of denominational, ethnic, theological and even national borders. Three factors became immediately obvious:

1) U.S. theological students represent a much wider age group than merely young adults, with the average age of U.S. theological students in the early thirties. The 85 were not able to bring together under one roof the wealth of an inter-seminary movement along with the critical issues of young adults who are either students, workers or young professionals.

2) The participation and leadership of women and black students was fairly strong, but the meeting did not at all suggest the reality of the U.S. population. There were but two Hispanics and a couple of Canadian Asian guests. Where was the vast Hispanic and Asian American church? Was there a problem in inviting their involvement? Or does this suggest that Hispanics and Asians are not found in many theological institutions? If so, why? Hard questions, yes, but also ones which suggest a truth of student movements: they are useful in monitoring or at least suggesting the missionary health of the Church and its institutions. Great care must be taken in nurturing them.

Few of us had been to Vancouver or had ever participated in a national ecumenical event. This author was among the "new" people. He was also one of the many who had never found a way to get into the work of the WCC & NCCC/USA. Hence, the call to "Embrace the World" was an exciting possibility and vision, but we realized that most students did not yet have a sense of where the previous people were leaving them. We were still too mystified by the diversity of those gathered in Cleveland to be able to step forward together into our future.

## **"Embrace the World" in Student Perspective**

It was clear in the larger forum that embracing the whole

world is painful for North Americans. It is an embrace characterized not by our imperialism or paternalism, but by our opportunity to listen and by "the strength of our Christian powerlessness" (from the keynote address, Dr. Emilio Castro). We are reconciled with a God who loves the world back to life. Looking upon the wrenching issues of U.S. domestic life and foreign affairs, we could easily despair. The U.S. people—who all Christians are called to embrace—are emerging into the latter part of this century with an agonizing pain of racist alienation, a guilt, yet pride, over our ability to manipulate the world for our own "national interests" (or, ecclesial world manipulation by U.S. church interests), economic loss for our little people, and bewilderment over reconstructing a humanity of cultural rupture and uprootedness. Indeed, it is where rugged individualism (see Bellah's informative book, *Habits of the Heart*, Chapter I) has become a vague covenant of the neighborless. Let us call it "the pain of the North American heart."

The Christian students in Cleveland stumbled across this pain in trying to agree on a purpose. We struggled for our very self-identity between a long historical legacy of U.S. student movements and the call for a "changing of the guard" which launches us directly into the heart of an ecumenism which revitalizes the Christian world mission in and through our North American context. The 85 young adults and theological students who met gave very confusing and unclear signals. Measuring the expectations of the passing generation of ecumenists against the current student disarray, the U.S. churches could be on the threshold of a major crisis at a time of wrenching challenges in U.S. national life. Will the ecumenical movement rise to proclaim the gospel (Good News) closer to the pain of the North American heart? How can students then best serve as witnesses who embrace that pain? How should theologically engaged persons understand the revival of an ecumenical seminary movement like ENTS?

### A Legacy of Student Movements

This is not the first time students have struggled for a sense of purpose. We recall the Mt. Hermon 100—college people who gathered ecumenically under the leadership of evangelist Dwight L. Moody in 1886 (Wallstrom, p. 42). Then this movement helped create the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, with a watchword which thrust the churches together, later reinterpreted to mean "the evangelization of the world in (every) generation" (Robert, p. 146).

In the 1890s we saw the creation of the World Christian Student Federation, founded by John Mott. "This was the movement which was destined to produce the great bulk of the modern ecumenical movement" (Rouse & Neill, p. 341), including the IMC, Faith & Order, and Life and Work Movements, leading also to the inclusion of eastern Orthodox churches in 1911.

At the same time, there arose the Inter-Seminary Movement, to propagate mission involvement and study. In the 1920s there was evidence of growing missiological maturity and integrity. The aim was to "permeate with the Spirit of the Gospel not only individuals, but also society and international relationships" (Wallstrom, pp. 84-85). In 1948 the ISM was linked to the World Council of Churches at a time when U.S. students gathered so "that many came back to the college campuses determined to live a better life and to do more thinking along international lines" (Wallstrom, p. 70). In 1969 it finally voted to absolve itself.

If student ecumenical movements in the fifties were marked by recreation and pastoral care, students of the sixties were a full swing away from this in an emphasis with the WSCF on

social revolution and death to the status quo of social structures. In 1966, the University Christian Movement made its historic stand on civil rights (Rouse & Neill, p. 356). Developing a very distinct contrast to this social activism was what is now known as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, wherein the depth reality of the Gospel was re-emphasized.

At Vancouver, 200 U.S. and Canadian students gathered to form the Theological Students Consortium. This was made to link seminarians together and for seminarians to have a formative ecumenical experience to take into the churches. Out of this assembly grew the U.S. version of TSC, CTSCUS, in November, 1983. In 1985 in Washington, D.C. it held a national event and it also held a Seminar for Ecumenical Training in which it had broad representation and was divided regionally for a more incarnational approach. Today, we have ENTS as the continuation of that movement.

Notice again how the shift in emphasis to unity without a basic clarity of mission (world/gospel engagement) signaled in every case the waning of student movements and the lingering of burdensome student structures. Latourette, the great church historian, on reflecting upon the history of ecumenism, concluded that "the ecumenical movement was in large part the outgrowth of the missionary movement" (Rouse & Neill, p. 353). Purpose is derived from reflection upon God's liberating and reconciling engagement with a broken world. Lack of purpose is deadly to students. We need not expect any less of a failure of the modern-day ENTS if it does not seek to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ in these days.

### The Call to "Change the Guard"

The same can be said of the North American churches. Contemporary ecumenical structures continue to prove muddled, confusing and unattractive to students who demand a great sense of clarity of purpose before responding to a call to "change the guard." We want to know what it is we are called to guard! In fact, would we not rather communicate a contextually-relevant Gospel, than hold it in safety? The old ecumenical movement assembled this October 2-5 in Cleveland communicated two things to the students by its speakers and forums: 1) U.S. Christians must wait and listen to the Third World people and seek ways to relate more justly to them, and 2) U.S. churches must be re-directed to reforming U.S. foreign and domestic policy.

These points reflect a great maturity and wisdom. They have been long in coming to our ears. But they still display a crippled U.S. missiology. They fail to get in touch with the complex institutions and peoples of the contemporary United States. They still shift our primary mission away from our own communities. It reflects a missiology which exports missionaries, but not with a crucified mind or a sense that we have dealt with issues in our context and can share our brokenness as equals with the whole Body of Christ. It is interested in the mission of the other five continents to themselves, but not yet the fullness of "mission in and through six continents" (WCC, *Mission & Evangelism*, p. 66).

But the U.S. is no longer the center of Christianity, as Buhmann has pointed out (*The Coming of the Third Church*). Nor can we speak any longer of a Third World when we recognize the expansive ethnic and minority communities and religious systems now impoverished by yet re-shaping U.S. society (see Samuel & Sugden, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*). Furthermore, there is the tremendous challenge of dechristianization confronting the U.S. world outside our ecclesial barriers, as well as all the implications in and beyond the church of the cry for the considerations of gender in personal

and public life.

One can perceive among the student participants an ever so slight shift in ecumenism out of our identification with this reality. Perhaps behind our hesitancy and lack of "official" goals is a consensus that something can emerge out of ENTS if anywhere in North American Christian life. *It must.* It is with faith and sweat and blood that the U.S. Church must newly identify itself with God in the waning moments of the 20th century. ENTS must serve this end. The theologically engaged North American ought rightly give birth to a wholly new, wholly continuous church witnessing to the Gospel in all six continents through the pain of the North American heart.

# The Kairos Convocation

by Wilma Jakobsen

*The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the church.*

These opening words of the Kairos Document, first published in September 1985, have proved to be more than prophetic. Since that time, the crises in South Africa has intensified, and the challenge for the church in its struggle there increases every day. The closing call of the Kairos Document to the "Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world to give the necessary support . . . so that the daily loss of so many young lives may be brought to a speedy end" led to much discussion and positive responses from churches throughout the world. It was this call which led the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (N.C.C.) to sponsor the Kairos Convocation in mid-November 1986.

The aim of the convocation was to focus and reflect on the question of what solidarity with the suffering majority of God's people in the South African population requires of U.S. Christians. With this aim in mind, a diverse group of approximately two hundred people gathered at Chicago Theological Seminary for the Kairos Convocation. A number of South Africans were present, including guest speakers Rev. Frank Chikane of the Institute for Contextual Theology, Dr. Gabriel Setiloane and Rev. Malusi Mpumlwane, both from the Religious Studies Department of the University of Cape Town. Other South Africans included those presently studying in the U.S.A., as well as those exiled from their homeland. Many of the Americans present had been active in South Africa at different times. The ecumenical nature of the conference demonstrated by the wide variety of denominations and perspectives reflected, with about ten percent being evangelical.

The Kairos Document, issued by a large group of South African lay and professional theologians, arose out of a concern to discover how to respond as Christians (especially as pastors in townships) to the intensification of repression, violence and civil war in their country. The document first analyzes and critiques what it terms "state theology," the dominant ideology of the Afrikaner government and church, and

Bellah, Frank, ed., *Habits of the Heart*, (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1985).  
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Rouse, Ruth and Stephen C. Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948* 2nd ed., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967).  
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World Council of Churches, *Gathered for Life* (Official Report; VI Assembly, Vancouver, Canada), (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983).  
*Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (A Study Guide), (Geneva: WCC Publications), 1983).

"church theology," which refers to the tendency of the white English-speaking churches to indulge in much talk but little concrete action. It then explores "prophetic theology," which outlines the direction the churches should move to make an authentic response to the crisis (yet—also kairos—opportunity) which the situation in South Africa presents.

The structure of the Kairos Convocation reflected that of the document, and thus the plenary sessions focused on state theology, church theology and prophetic theology, with each major address followed by responses from a panel reflecting different backgrounds and ideologies. Each session began with expositional Bible study by Dr. Thomas Hoyt of the Hartford Seminary Foundation. The Bible passages related directly to the focus of the address, and the studies were a highlight of the conference for many. Romans 13, Revelation 13 and Luke 4:16-21 thus formed the backdrop to the major addresses, and it was exciting to hear how Dr. Hoyt set the passages into their historical context and applied them into the present times.

The plenary sessions were always followed by small group discussions, which picked up on issues raised in earlier presentations. It was here that the issues were debated more intensely, as each group contained such a wide variety of people. It was in these groups that frustrations and feelings of powerlessness were aired. It was also impressive to see the willingness to be self-critical, reflecting what the Kairos Document meant for the U.S. church as well as the South African church. This self-critique often ranked alongside the never-ending "but what are we going to *do*?" questions about South Africa.

This willingness to reflect on the need for justice here in the U.S. as a necessary aspect of support for suffering Christians in South Africa meant that the focus on "church theology" was possibly the hardest to deal with. This is because its critique of "active-in-rhetoric-lacking-in-action" churches hit home for many people present. In her main address on this topic, Dr. Sheila Briggs of the University of Southern California, said church theology is a co-opting of the church by the state; it is a praxis by which the church is not imitating the praxis of Jesus of Nazareth, rejecting the radical demand of Christ to take up the cross. She agreed with the Kairos Document that too often in church theology, reconciliation in South Africa is based on a false perception of reality, because the conflict in South Africa is not based on misunderstanding, but on two opposing realities. Church theology is ultimately aligned with the status quo, unwilling to take the risks of

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