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The Art of the Master Carpenter

Our book is largely about instruments: invisible tools that we use when dealing with each other. About expectations, fears, hopes, manipulations and acceptance – just to name a few at random. It also presents us with life situations in which we tend to become numb tools of others or treat others with insensitive instrumentality.

But above all – we focus on the timeless human quest for instruments that can remedy what has gone wrong. According to Miyamoto MUSASHI, a necessary accomplishment of the master carpenter is to have sharp tools and to know that she or he has to sharpen them in her or his spare moments.

The master must be able to sort the lumber and use its different kinds in appropriate places. This person shall know the degrees of ability of the other carpenters and assign them to their tasks accordingly.

Such person is bound to make major decisions from small bits of information, which is like constructing a great Buddha from a one-foot model. She or he realizes that to know one is to know ten thousand. Thus the master maintains various tools, and carries them around in a box.

Medi(t)ations, (Re)conciliations

Divided Christianity, divided Europe, divided Central Europe and divided societies, are the main concerns that gave rise to our book. Even though at times they might seem to be separate problems, from a closer perspective they appear to be connected by invisible lines drawn in our minds.

Divisions cause pain and ask for remedy. The ecumenical movement attempts to reconcile the divided Church, the European Union (EU) tries to unite European countries and nations under a common flag, regional initiatives seek to create a solid basis for co-operation and collectives of mediators do their best in bringing the spirit of reconciliation into interpersonal or communitarian conflicts.

Goodwill and the hermeneutics of goodwill are the basis for any kind of progress in situations where division is the norm. On the other hand, goodwill needs expertise in order to know how to time its steps. Similarly, social engineering without goodwill can hardly offer a long-term vision of fruitful dialogue.

The contributions in our book are just a few of these numerous meditations on how to move forward. Some of us analyse concrete

experiences with reconciliation and mediation processes; some of us offer theoretical methodology; while others highlight the achievements and criticise the shortcomings of our common projects.

In many cases we deal with issues that for decades and centuries have been inducements for individual meditations, as well as for large-scale councils and gatherings that sought viable ways of mediation and ultimately also of reconciliation. Hence the title of the book: medi(t)ations, (re)conciliations.

Central European Integration

Both of our sub-topics to this book – conflict resolution and European integration – are particularly apropos to the Central European Subregion (CESR) of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

European integration is hardly a new concept to the (currently) five countries of the CESR, who integrated of their own accord in 2001, seeking to strengthen Central European identity before and after joining the European Union and to build up paradigms of peace and reconciliation through dialogue.

Rejecting the conventional dichotomy of East and West, the sub-region brings together a handful of countries in the heart of Europe – Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – in order to explore their pivotal importance in the greater European landscape through an ecumenical and intercultural youth cooperation.

Our programme of mutual education, collaboration and cultural exchange is embodied annually in two seminars, a book, and an ecumenical language and leadership training. Our book anthologises ideas and discourse springing forth from the seminars, allowing this dialogue to persist and multiply through the numerous people who contribute to, shape and read it.

Our book is the continuation of a series. Our first publication in 2002 was about Central Europe, ecology and ecumenism, entitled *A Pentatonic Landscape*; and our second anthology in 2003 was on identity, culture and responsibility, under the title *The River Book*. One can find all the articles of our anthologies on our website: www.wscf-cesr.org.

Conflict resolution, the other half of the equation, is also especially fitting for the CESR as it forms the foundation of our work: providing a space for discussion and sharing ideas from different perspectives in an open-minded, non-confrontational way – a forum of Christian witness and ecumenical dialogue for students.

Thus the overall mission of the CESR (as of her mother organisation, the World Student Christian Federation) is in itself a kind of reconciliation: between faith and life, towards unity in diversity across the boundaries of denomination, nation, culture and gender.

Schisms and Society

Our first chapter takes its topic from our summer seminar, *Conflict Resolution in Our Inner Life and in Community*, held in July in Pápa, Hungary. We start with a discussion of the theoretical basis of conflict resolution, describing two different approaches.

According to the ideas of a leading Mennonite peace scholar, John Paul LEDERACH, a conceptual framework for peace building and reconciliation has to deal with various time frames (short-, middle- and long-term), with various levels of actors (top, middle and grassroots level) and with the processes of transition, transformation and healing of relations in order to be sustainable.

Mediation is a specific process designed to help people work through their conflicts and find solutions that fit for all involved. Sitting in the middle is a picture of what mediation is all about. It works, if mediators do their job as well as possible, and parties indeed want to solve their conflicts – regardless of what experiences they might have had with conflict resolution in the past.

We explore reconciliation in three specific geographical locations and historic periods. Starting in North America, efforts by the United Church to introduce conversation about *Canada's* ongoing fragmented relationship with indigenous peoples took the form of a book, *Justice and Reconciliation*. It frames reconciliation as a problem of “broken relationship,” which will involve listening to stories, conversion, and a commitment to work for justice in responsive solidarity.

Moving to post-World War II Central Europe, the sweeping political and societal changes of the time manifested themselves on the microcosmic level in the city of *Törökbálint*, near Budapest. Ethnic clashes ensued there from massive population exchanges, the roots of which can be sought in the depths of social inequalities.

Most recently, ethnic tensions in the former Yugoslavia are still simmering after the brutal wars of the early '90s. Forgiveness, the underlying essence of reconciliation in any sense, is addressed in this context by a unique cross-border initiative in *Vojvodina*, attempting reconciliation among the domicile and refugee children from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro.

We address specific aspects of conflict and resolution. The conflicts we call “generational conflicts” (originating from the *generation gap*) deserve attention as a mirror for justice and equality studies.

Attempting to de-metaphorise and deconstruct them, we realise the complexity of the concepts of generation and generation gap. The latter is a sincere term for *describing* uncounted conflicts, but less for *measuring* those conflicts.

Conflict resolution not uncommonly occurs within the context of an institutionalised system of justice as well. One of the most fundamental problems is how to harmonize two senses of *justice*: one claiming punishment in proportional response to a crime; and the other endorsing individual punishments taking into consideration the special case of each offender.

The focus of Central European penal law reforms is to work out a more “funnel-shaped” sanction system – one where a majority of offenders get alternative sanctions, rather than being imprisoned – especially where juveniles are concerned. Thus the dilemma between the two senses of justice must be resolved in order to bring Central Europe’s penal code in line with her Western peers.

United Continent, Divided Opinions

Joining the Western peers was of our particular concern this year with the long-awaited enlargement of the European Union. This topic formed the core of our winter seminar in Linz, Austria, *Growing EU: Hopes and Fears of Members and Candidates*, held in February in the thick of preparations for expansion.

The European Union as a political reality is a widely discussed phenomenon. Her past, present and future offer an array of issues that concern the very basic values and priorities of the European continent.

The EU has gradually evolved from an economic community composed of six countries into a complex political unit comprising 25 states. On 1 May 2004 the Central European countries of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia became EU member states. Their citizens often ask whether or not EU membership is a *mixed blessing*.

We deal with actual and potential advantages and disadvantages that Central European EU members cope with. The issues of capital flow, national sovereignty, workforce migration, agricultural subsidies and the like are being looked at from the point of view of the new members.

The political and economic *transition in Hungary* serves as a case study of the process of integration of one of the new member states. We elaborate the Magyar experience with gradual accommodation to EU legislation and economic policies, together with the specificities of the Magyar political and economic milieu.

We analyse the economic reforms and ensuing rapid growth that characterised Hungary in the second half of the '90s, together with the symptoms of economic fragility that appeared in 2003–2004.

We present the struggle against corruption, unemployment and many other negative syndromes of transition, as incentives for further study and comparison with other Central European countries.

Another case study of ours is the *Slovak perspective* on European integration. We briefly review the accession process, its challenges and problems. Special attention is given to Slovak progress in membership criteria fulfilment, as well as in the accession negotiations between Slovakia and the EU.

We also evaluate the decisive historical choice the Slovak Republic was faced with, and conclude that European Union membership seems to be the only viable option in the given historical situation.

One of the hot issues in the recent history of the European Union is the preamble to the *EU Constitution* and the question of whether or not it should explicitly refer to God and Christian values as an integral part of the common European heritage.

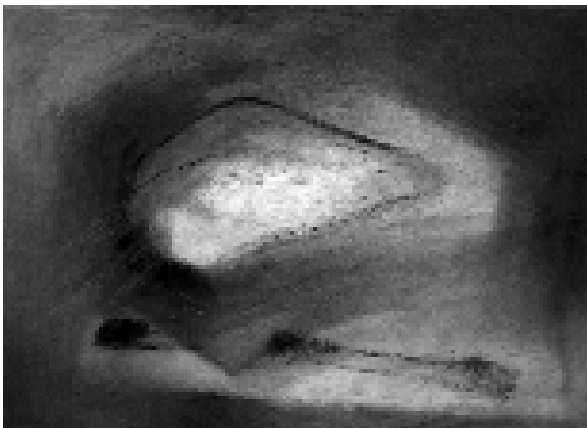
We approach the problem by distinguishing between the descriptive and normative aspects of the given issue, allowing us to examine the potential consequence of the inclusion of the reference to God and Christian values in the European Constitution.

Truth, Compassion and Beauty

We also deal with the readiness of the individual and the community for dialogue, in interpersonal, interdenominational and interreligious levels, and the role of arts in this conflict resolution process.

Søren KIERKEGAARD analysed negative *fixation* within the framework of lifestyles of aesthetic, ethical and religious orientation. It is a source of conflicts in personality development and interpersonal relations, as well as in the relationship with the transcendence, with God.

When examining the process of how fixation takes root, as well as the arguments with which it is usually advocated, we emphasize the importance of the *creative autonomy* of each human subject.



Methods of conflict resolution in the *Bible* have profound implications for us when prophesying, building and testifying to the growing unity of God's people, and anticipating its fulfilment, the day of Jezreel.

God cares for all communities of faith, reveals Godself to them, accepts their sacrifices, appoints them to be blessings to the world, and deals with them with profound *compassion*. Another world is possible, where after centuries of endurance in suffering because of our division, we are ready to confess our sins, to humble ourselves and repent.

Our gifts should come before us, as signs of our first love, even until the point of self-emptying (*kenosis*). Our dialogue is nurtured by prayer, growing in knowledge of the others and approaching them through the *hermeneutics of goodwill*.

We attain a more Catholic vision of our Lord's high priestly prayer recorded in John 17: the ecumenical goal requires agreement not only in matters of faith, but also of order. In *solidarity* with our neighbour, we intend to stay together and grow in unity. Is our Father still alive?

Christianity has had a tendency towards self-sufficiency in her attitude towards other religions, but now we have taken a more open approach and started to acknowledge *truth* in other religions: we have to be ready to learn from all presence of truth.

The questions of our own beliefs, our stance on others' beliefs and the place of borders present a challenge to each religious system to look for its own answers. We must address the basic issues in Christianity to find out if we are ready to enter *dialogue*.

We define interreligious relationships as conflicts with *challenges* and opportunities. If the religious actors do not know their own possibilities and options, they cannot use them creatively to fill in the gaps which separate them from others.

There is Christian *art*, and art does have a role in the Church, because of the common source whence artistic and religious impulses originate. There were times when the Church integrated the best from architecture, sculptures, paintings and poetry to music into Her liturgical life.

The Church of our days should also be here for us to give meaning and full support for all genuine efforts to enlarge our knowledge of reality and to deepen our perception of the *mystery* of life.

On the other hand, there is indeed a theological relationship between creation and destruction, where the creative arts function as modes of *reconciliation* in communities torn apart by violence.

In the true nature of reality and the role of the human in defining and adapting to it, the emphasis is on the creation of a *positive peace* between humans, the natural world and God; rather than on a negative peace, the mere absence of open conflict.

The Church has an understanding of reality, which gives meaning to arts and theoretical science, in which truth, compassion and *beauty* have lasting meaning in the context of the eternal destiny of humankind.

Reconciliation Cycle

An ecumenical anthology is a joint project of many individuals and communities. We would like to express our gratitude towards our contributors: first of all to the authors; then to our art editor, and to all our translators.

We would also like to thank the main organisers of our three seminars in 2004: most of all, *Suzanna VERGOUWE*, our coordinator, and *Stephan ANZENGRUBER*, *ASZALÓS Kinga*, *Doris HOFSTÖTTER*, *Hella KLOSJUS*, *LÉVAI Ildikó*, *Aleksandra LUKSZA*, *Elżbieta MAZUR*, *Magdalena MULARCZYK*, *Eva-Maria REINER* and *SZASZKÓ Sándor*.

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Finally, we thank the artist, *Dušan SOLTYS (1974)*, who provided the illustrations for the book. He is a graduate in visual arts in the Academy of Fine Arts in Praha, Czech Republic, and stage design in the Academy of Performing Arts in Praha.

Most recently, he teaches art and is involved in alternative theatre as an actor and stage designer. His focus in monumental paintings is on abstract landscape and body. A prominent exhibition he took part in was the Biennale of Young Artists from Central Europe in 2000 in Praha.

The *Reconciliation Cycle* in our book consists of abstract landscape motives inspired by reconciliation on several levels. First, it is about the reconciliation of human beings with the landscape – with characters and elements that shape land, like light, space and grass structure.

Furthermore, the cycle unveils principles of *nature* herself, her rules and cycles, through which we can encounter her transformations. That is why some drawings are inspired by harvest fields, which are places where one season ends to give space for a new life.

This Reconciliation Cycle was made in Sudetenland near a settlement of *Pocheň*, which lies in Silesia near the borders with Poland. Before the expulsion of Germans, it was a purely German and prosperous village, *Pochenmühl*.

The encounter with particular occurrences in nature leads us towards thoughts and reflections about the past and history of this landscape and its meaning for the inhabitants in the present time.

The present face of the Silesian landscape seems neglected and wild. But underneath this surface, we can trace marks of our disappeared and vanished fellow human beings and communities, carpenters and pastors alike, one can even now see, touch and feel.

