

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs

## Agglutinative Labyrinth

What you give to me, you give it to everyone  
– so says the earthly power.

What you give to everyone, you give it to me  
– so says the heavenly power.

(WEŐRES Sándor)

### Words of Students

More than thirty years ago, in 1969, the last issue of the world's first ever ecumenical journal and the first international Christian journal, *Student World*, was published. Since 1908, *Student World* (SW) had been a voice and forum of ecumenically-minded students and young intellectuals, creating a network of concerns and ideas. In *Johannesburg* (South Africa), 2002, the Executive Committee (ExCo) of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) decided to restart this important ecumenical review.

The story goes back almost a century. It was in 1907 when the WSCF General Committee Meeting in *Tokyo* (Japan) decided to publish the quarterly *Student World* (edited first by John R. MOTT), to become a major forum on the faith and life of Christians and of the Student Christian Movements. This meeting was the first international gathering of any kind to take place in modern Asia.

For the next sixty years, the journal was a crucial forum for the widening and deepening of the ecumenical movement. Following the recommendations of the 1967 Executive Committee, the General Assembly in 1968 decided to replace *Student World* with a network of communication which they deemed more effective. The publication of the journal was discontinued at the end of 1969 (the last editor being Risto LEHTONEN), to be replaced by series materials (*Dossiers* and *WSCF Books*) and a house organ (*Newsletter*).

These are the three decisions which set up the framework of our adventure now. Youth movements have the inclination to easily forget their own traditions, because of the revolutionary and reforming character of the age between eighteen and thirty-five in human life. WSCF was quick to answer the challenges of the times, but was sometimes also quick to forget its own history.

According to the plans of the present editorial board - whose composition reflects the varieties and balances of the Federation - *Student World* will come out in one or two issues a year, with articles published in English, Spanish and French, the current official languages of the Federation. This first issue of 2003 focuses on "Power and Principalities" (*Poderes y Principados, Pouvoir et Principautés*). We have chosen essays and articles focusing on the connections between Christian faith and political power, but also between divine powers and the principalities of darkness. Authors were encouraged to contribute to ecumenical thinking by exploring power, with all its positive and negative features.

## Biblical Powers and Principalities

Where does our first topic come from? The meaning of the word power is more or less clear, but what is the role of principalities in the title? If we look it up the dictionary, this word has four different meanings. First, it has a historical, political meaning, referring to the area (state, office, or authority) governed by a prince. Then, it has a contemporary political meaning: it can be used when distinguishing or clarifying the reality of a political state. When used in the plural form, the word can refer to an order of angels within a celestial hierarchy. Finally, the fourth definition is the theological (biblical) use of the word.

It is not the dictionary, however, which guides us ultimately in the choice of the title. There are four Pauline letters in the Bible where the two words in our title are grouped and used together: Romans, Ephesians, Colossians and Titus. In *Romans 8,38-39* we read: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* In this text, powers and principalities are something humanity must struggle with, a force which might try to separate us from the love of God, but also a force that we can overcome.

This thought is continued in *Ephesians 6,12*. Here they are the object of a struggle in which Christians must be engaged: *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* It seems Paul is asserting this struggle to be quite fundamental to the life of a Christian, warranting the dawning of the complete armor of God.

*Ephesians 3,8-11* uses them to describe the rulers and authorities over which Christ has ascended. *“I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ . . . to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Again, the idea that they are something to overcome.

The syntagma appears twice also in the letter to the *Colossians. 1,16-17* affirms the earthly nature of these things that were created by Christ and created for Him. *“For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.”* According to the tradition there are seven orders of angels: archangels, cherubs, seraphs, powers, principalities, dominions and thrones. The text emphasizes that they all centre around Christ. *Colossians 2,15* is referring to God’s disarming of evil angels, the cross triumphs over these. *“And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”*

Finally, *Titus 3,1-2* presents them as an earthly system of maintaining order to which Christians must submit themselves: *“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak*

*evil of no person, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all persons.*” This verse seems to suggest the possibility of human governments to carry out good works.

### **Ideologies: Options for Today**

The title of the last issue of *Student World* (245-246) was *Ideologies: Options for Today*. We deemed it symbolic and rich in meaning to continue the life of the journal with a similar topic, which can take up the same questions, applied to the present context of our world. Let us now take a look at the structure of the present publication.

The editorial is followed by an introduction to the topic from one of our Co-Secretaries General. Then follow the four chapters. The choice of the topic for this edition is not the only bridge which connects the past with the present. In the first chapter, two Senior Friends share their thoughts with us on the history and future of the ecumenical movement.

The second chapter deals with power in its political form. Here we encounter conflicts and co-operations between church and state, individual morality and communitarian behaviour: models of engagement and action are analysed. The third chapter continues this line, but from another angle. Freedom, cooperation, justice and peace are crucial and essential for a responsible personality: but how are they possible in systems of organised oppression?

Lastly, we have a look at power understood in a spiritual way: as a temptation and challenge to our faith. The closing piece of the journal is a liturgy of exorcism of the war spirit, which is – unfortunately – more relevant today than ever.

### **Vine-shoots and Electric Circuit**

The power relationship of the urban human to nature has changed, as the illustrator of our issue, ALBERT Ádám tells us; it is a marvel and a challenge at the same time. Parks in the urban space, besides being small green reservations, constitute a special scene for social encounters as well. Gardens offer an infinite variety of exploration paths. This involves entering into the perspectives of various people in various eras, such as the character of a scientist or a gardener, to construct a new reality.

On the back cover, we see vine-shoots, which remind us of an ancient exotic alphabet as well as of the two tablets of the Decalogue: the power of nature and law, knowledge and creation. On the front cover, there are the etched ruins of the antique princely palace of Knossos in Crete. In the form similar to an integrated electric circuit or a microchip, the picture depicts the interplay between the technical and industrial revolution and earthly political power, between order and culture. These two etchings are the emblem and framework of our present issue.

According to historians, the building of the palace was agglutinative, new emperors and princes added new elements to the edifice, and that can be an explanation for its labyrinth-like ground-plan. Let us wander and wonder in the labyrinth of ideas and thoughts of this journal, never losing the red thread of Ariadne: our Christian discernment.