

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs

Integrity and Mutual Interdependence

For this issue of Student World (SW), we called for articles, among others, on gender perspectives in Christian faith and on human rights; on overcoming violence against women in family, society and Church, and in armed conflicts and war. Also, we expected contributions on trafficking in women, prostitution and HIV/AIDS; on cultural and socio-economic implications of imbalanced power constructions; on gender socialisation, roles, equality and discrimination. Finally, we encouraged essays on possibilities for reconciliation, cooperation, community and communion between women and men; and on a common culture of respect for human dignity and integrity.

I. Roles and Relations

1. Empowering Equality

The ecumenical movement is particularly responsible for making these topics real challenges to her constituency. She has to fulfil her aim of using student ministry to realise God's *Basileia*, where justice and peace reign. The ecumenical Student Christian Movement (SCM) should truly acknowledge her prophetic role of solidarity, justice and peace in the student ministry and in the Church. An excellent example for this was the interregional World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) conference on *Gender Roles and Power Relations*, in July 2005 in Manila, Philippines.

It is of a crucial importance that genuine human roles be given more space for imagination, dimension and respect for diversity. Women and men should be equal partners in our Church, in our family and in our society. Acknowledgment and understanding should serve for the empowerment of both women and men to work towards genuine gender equality, equity and justice.

The equality of all humanity, of women and men alike, is the most basic principle of human rights in the world today, which should affect the lives of billions of women and men in all communities and socio-economic situations, cutting across all forms of cultural and religious diversity. Equality is not only a formal principle of physical contacts. It should entail the right for equal chances in positions and in advancement opportunities in work, academia or Church.

Equality is a shining challenge for anyone who sees herself or himself

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as superior or more significant, but also as inferior or even insignificant for whatever reasons. We should bear witness for equality in educational institutions, in social facilities, and in the neighbourhood as well.

The insights of equality can rewrite certain cultural practices which are unnecessarily binding us in the name of keeping traditions and cultures intact—especially when stereotypes, insensitive languages and ways of thinking are constantly reinforced. Equality should affect us physically (somatically), emotionally, psychologically, mentally and most of all spiritually. It should enable all of us to fully fulfil our lives with potential and dignity, and to fully participate in the Church and in society as co-creators.

The world should be a safe haven for everyone, women and men alike, where the culture of life constantly brings forth its fruits and blessings. Food and nutrition are so basic for human life, that they should be the first things to be provided for all. Another parallel need in the intellectual and spiritual field is the right to be able to read and write.

All of us have to try to raise each other's living and working conditions, in order to create a community of open dialogue and solidarity, providing protection and recognition for each other. Even though many societies have already narrowed the equality gap between human and human, in terms of certain rights, education and job opportunities, all of these problems are of course just the very tip of an enormous iceberg.

Not only sporadic, but also structural or systematic evil (in the political, economic and social strata) should be fought against, likewise in an institutionalised or systematic way. Global economic injustices affect us gravely when, for example, we are considered of a lesser or greater economic value than other workers in the power relations. This situation calls us to bear each other's most negative brunt of burdens in the pace of economic globalization, mostly co-ordinated and orchestrated by the profit-minded multinational companies and corporations.

Stereotyping dictated by narrow-mindedness, however, and one-dimensional societal roles are constructed on our singular characteristics. What it means to be ourselves is not only a naturally given or divinely ordained fact; these are also social and cultural constructs, which many times have become naturalised and legitimised as common sense. For example, the spiritual virtues of strength, endurance, assertiveness, softness, gentleness, and selflessness can and should be mastered by the same persons as well, maybe by all of us.

Equality should be the guiding principle, of course, also in the midst of the Church. The charisma and treasures of all of us should be used properly to preach, to minister, to become ordained or to assume leadership positions in our denominations. We are called to be the backbone of the Church, but also to be Her faithful servant by providing proper leadership. 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.

2. Healing Unity

Women and men of faith have always struggled with images of God that are almost exclusively dominated by masculine language, to find their *Scriptural Identities*. But there is ample material to have a dialogue about the feminine characteristics of and mother language about God. Through Bible Study, we discover that God is Mother as well as Father, and more importantly, God is a God Who transcends gender and foils the narrow construction of human expectations.

Hagar's story, as a good example, is about multiple oppressions in terms of class, gender and race, and of women surviving when finding themselves as single mothers abandoned by their families. It reveals how Hagar suffered not only as Abraham's concubine, but as an Egyptian slave woman, a foreigner, a refugee. Still, God does hear the cry of the poor and the oppressed. The components of the tapestry of liberation are perseverance, power to struggle for justice, hope and courage to defy violence by risking one's life.

The Tradition of WSCF has also 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 alike in the shape and procedures of her own movement, in the divisions and friendships between the many separate denominations of the one Body of Christ, the Church Universal; and also in the promise that the Universal Church can offer, *Healing our Brokenness*, in the struggles of communities, promising ways to discover and live out a single humanity.

Our question for all times remains: how will our encounters create an environment for genuine dialogue? In trying to answer this important question, we have to portray the joys and challenges of ecumenism, as perceived through our genuine and personal encounters in community. But the search for the true God remains; and the basic criteria to find the presence of the authentic God are love and truth; and compassion with the victims can serve as a hermeneutical path to evaluate reality. Indeed, the concrete and dynamic testimony of Christians is the ferment and seed of the future for a different society.

Still, the healing and purification of memories, which is the main prerequisite for an honest dialogue, so far has remained an ineffective ecumenical slogan and has not been put into significant practice. But what is as yet an individualistic psychological concept should be practiced ecclesiastically and concretely by Christian faithful around the world. We should live in constructive acceptance of the tensions between our own inheritances and wherever our friendships with people from different backgrounds point us, and 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.

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 scales in exploiting natural resources. The witness of the Church therefore cannot uncritically identify with a narrow human rights discourse: we are at the same time called to defend the rights of nature.

What distinguishes the message of the cross is life in situations of death; and HIV, as another mounting question mark, greatly challenges this very heart of our Christian faith. HIV forces us to reflect on death—maybe to die in peace and to accept the victory of death over human body, spirit and soul. A key focus is the underlying factors and a prophetic contextual theology fit to faithfully respond to this situation.

To be woman and man in society is a cultural and educational construct, so it can be deconstructed with new social patterns and paradigms. Today, globalization, HIV/AIDS and global poverty are challenging our traditional system, regarding the way it

has gendered women and men in society. The new models of relationship between women and men today are to be centred on *Partnership and Empowerment*.

Women in many parts of the world are not given equal chances and opportunities, especially in areas like education and skill-building, which could make them self-sufficient. The realities of women in society point out their living conditions, their major hope questions, and their contribution to the deconstruction of our societies.

Thus they never get a chance to come forward and bring about a change in their own lives and society at large. Many are longing after changes at the heart of faith communities, thus calling out to leaders and men to take into consideration the capabilities that those women have for the construction of more human and ambitious communities.

In examining the structures of society, we find that in many places the origin of the undervaluation of women lies in religion as well as in various socio-cultural elements. Gender-based violence is a universal reality for many women on a daily basis, including physical, psychological, emotional and sociological. The closed mindset, the insensitive governance and the lack of political will for empowerment, the lopsided developmental pattern, or even the religious sanctions against women and the commodification of women are just some of the challenges ahead of us.

It always offers unique insights into the culture of violence when a certain woman's personal encounter with aggression throughout her whole life is fully portrayed. Her reactions to hostility and her methods of coping during her whole life reveal the wisdom learnt through violence and identify the faith wrestled with along the journey. We find that it is always a deep struggle for survival and a continuing search for meaning and depth.

A political will on gender sensitisation, emancipation through legislation and policy changes in favour of women and a concerted effort from the government and the civil society is the road map to overcome violence against women and to establish *A Safer Haven* through gender justice.

II. A Glance at Ecumenical History

When now the ecumenical world comes together in Porto Alegre in Brazil to harvest and celebrate her achievements and to dream the brave dream of the future, it is well worth having a look at three important aspects, which the phenomenon of Student World can offer for further consideration.

1. Review: A Chain of Editors

The official history book of WSCF, *Seeking and Serving the Truth: The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation* (1997) by Philip POTTER and Thomas WIESER, enlists the officers (general secretaries, chairpersons and vice-chairpersons) of the Federation in Appendix B. It does not, however, enlist the editors-in-chief of one of the great WSCF contributions to the ecumenical movement, *Student World*.

Since this is the first and the oldest ecumenical review in the world, we have the duty to mention these masterminds at least here in the editorial. Indeed, since 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.

So, the founding editor of SW is the person to whom the ecumenical movement as a whole is also attributed: *John R. MOTT*. From 1908 to 1926, first as general secretary, then as chairperson, he was the one responsible for the depth and intrepidity of the publication.

Francis P. MILLER served only for two years (1927–1929) in this position, even before he was elected chairperson. His role was to be a bridge between the first and second great ecumenical organisers and maintainers of many values.

This second great name is *Willem A. VISSER'T HOOFT*, who served as third editor for not less than ten years (1929–1939). He also started as general secretary and ended up as chairperson, while at the same time being the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (then under formation).

Robert C. MACKIE is enlisted as the fourth editor-in-chief (1939–1949), and he continued the tradition that the position is linked with that of the general secretary, and should be continued as a chairperson for one or more years.

The most tragic story is the one of *Philippe MAURY*, editor between 1950 and 1961, who could not follow this pattern, because he departed this Earth at a very young age, as a still-active general secretary.

To treasure his heritage, the Federation set up a *Philippe Maury Memorial Committee* (PhMMC). Its duty is, according to the WSCF Bye-Laws to the Constitution, is “to promote study and action on such themes concerning the relationship between *Christian faith, mission and politics*, as are of relevance to the WSCF.” A way of it can be “to hold Philippe Maury Memorial Events (PhMME)”.

Because in the recent decades there were no such official committees established and event hold, since 2003 it has been the Student World Editorial Board, which *de facto* exercised the duties of this Committee, and the Memorial Events were those of the publications of the ecumenical review itself.

The sixth editor (1961–1968), *Valdo GALLAND*, exercised this responsibility along with being general secretary. He was the one to introduce the red cover page of the review in 1961, after the original light brown.

The last general secretary to be an editor as well was *Risto LEHTONEN*, only for a year, in 1969. Then it was decided to discontinue the publication. No one expected Student World to resurrect and come to life again.

But, the new millennium was able to see this crucially important ecumenical review be resuscitated, in 2003, with a broader and more representative Editorial Board than ever. Its editor-in-chief has been the same since then, the eighth in the chain.

2. Intercession: The UDPS

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 observance of the Universal

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Day of Prayer for Students. This is the oldest tradition of ecumenical prayer in the whole Christian world. Its regular celebration paved the way to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) 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. The first editor of SW, John R. MOTT, said this of the UDPS:

“Experience is demonstrating that the observance of UDPS exerts a truly wonderful influence. Through this means Christian students and others are reminded in the most vital way of the students of all other nations and of their relation to a worldwide community. Such reflections and exercises cannot but widen the horizon and expand the heart.

“The uniting influence of this day is likewise evident and beneficent. At such a time and by such a spiritual process the students of the entire world come to realise their true oneness. This is one of the wonder-works of prayer. It would be difficult to overstate the federative power of intercession. There is something inspiring in the thought that sincere and earnest bands of students in countless places will be drawn together by way of prayer to one Heavenly Father. Who can measure the energising influence of this Day of Prayer?

“If it be true that there are added benefits from true agreement in prayer by even two or three followers of Jesus Christ: what limit can be placed on the united intercession of Christians throughout the student world? Potent as are the subjective influences of prayer, its largest significance is found in the realm of intercession for people and movements, for objects outside ourselves. This is prayer at its best. May students everywhere devote themselves to exploiting the undiscovered and unrealised possibilities of untried intercession.”¹

3. Illustration: Thematic Pinpointing

An ecumenical review would not be full without involving and channelling the contribution of arts to the ecumenical discourse. The re-established SW has always laid a great emphasis on treasuring the points the artists have to make for our topics. After a European and a North American artist, we have the pleasure to welcome an illustrator from the Middle East.

Nasser Rida AJAMI (nas_63@hotmail.com) is Lebanese, born in Liberia in 1963. He moved to Lebanon in 1974 and has been living in South Lebanon ever since. He has a B.A. in Social Sciences and a M.A. in Political Science from the Lebanese University. He was active in solidarity work between 1984 and 1989 as part of the Student Christian Movement (SCM).

He continued his work in community development, working as a social officer on community outreach, youth mobilization and action, public opinion surveys, participatory research and training in areas related to political participation among youth, education, health, family histories and community relations. He worked with both grassroots organizations as well as United Nations (UN) and international development

¹ Adapted from John R. MOTT's Editorials on the UDPS in *Student World* 1910/1. and 1913/1.

organizations. Between 1990 and 2005, he organized as well as participated in more than ten painting exhibitions; further, he works as a freelance illustrator for local and regional newspapers, including *Al Nahar*, *Al Safir* and *Al Hayat*.

His main publications include: *History of Confectionery Families in Saida* (Beirut, 1988), *Political Participation Among Youth at the Lebanese University* (Beirut, 1998), *Impact of Sports and Cultural Initiatives on Youth Engagement and Participation in South Lebanon* (Beirut, 1998), *Impact of Migration and Family Relations on Local Development* (Beirut, 2000), *Evaluation of Healthy Villages Project in Syria* (Beirut, 2001). His major art exhibitions include: *Nahda Association* (Tyre, 1982), *Democratic Lebanese Youth Group* (Saida, 1986), *Cultural and Literature Association* (Saida, 1990), *Dar-El-Nadwa* (Beirut, 1995), *Paris Art Gallery* (1998), *JABAL Group* (Zouk Mkhail, 2001), *ADG* (Gemayzeh, 2002), and *Festival de la Francophonie* (Gemayzeh, 2003).

In 2004, he attempted to produce and direct his first real-TV documentary, *Jarjaara*, addressing the plight of the fisherman community in South Lebanon. He has also co-partnered to establish a production company, as well as the Alternatives Initiative Network (AIN) focusing on cultural arts. He is currently working on a fiction movie inspired by the lives of people who have lived and survived civil strife.

In summary, we should find ourselves in a harmonised environment when participating in the structures in workplace, academia, Church and community, and play the games on an equal footing, in order to be able to stay in competition. Such mindsets will give a sufficient basis for justification and solidarity.

Equality (in the sense of Galatians 3,26–28: there is no difference between women and men) here lays claims on notions of identity, of rights and responsibilities, of access and of inclusion into institutions and sites of decision making. Equality fuels the balance of power relations between women and men, as it assumes the advantage and favour of both genders.

