

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.

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.

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.