

# *EEF - NET*

*News · Information · Discussions on Ecumenical Learning*

*Edited by the Education and Ecumenical Formation Staff of the World Council of Churches*

*No 18 / 19 November 2006*

*Christian  
education  
belongs ...  
to the  
whole church*

*LAST ISSUE*

## Dear Colleagues in Ecumenical Learning and Formation

*This is the final time that we will be writing to you in this way as this is the last issue of EEF-NET. The new structure of the WCC approved by the Central Committee in September envisages an ecumenical formation programme which integrates the work done from the Ecumenical Centre and in Bossey. The initial proposals envisage a new WCC journal on ecumenical formation but more work on the plans has to be done by the new Commission before this is finalised.*

*The Porto Alegre Assembly had the intention of being an ecumenical formation event. This issue contains some of the important documents from the Porto Alegre Assembly that have a particular relevance for ecumenical formation. The Message of the Assembly is in the form of a prayer. It can be used to help heighten awareness of the concerns of the ecumenical movement and to encourage people to respond. Ecumenical formation featured as one of the Ecumenical Conversations in which delegates and young adults who were not delegates were invited to participate. The Scholarships programme facilitated the participation of a group of young ecumenists in the Assembly – not just paying for them to attend but setting up an interactive preparatory process, offering times of reflection during the Assembly and a follow-up process. The Muirão was a feast of ecumenical formation opportunities with seminars/workshops, Bible studies, a series of sessions on ecumenism, exhibitions, a theological café for theological educators, cultural events and conversations with young and old ecumenical personalities. As you will see from the Programme Guidelines Committee report, ecumenical formation was*

*strongly emphasised for the future work of the WCC and the future of the ecumenical movement.*

*The new programme structure of the WCC is taking shape following the first full meeting of the Central Committee in August/September. Although we can report on the broad outlines, the detail is still a work in progress.*

*Other articles in this issue take up two concerns that have been present in our work throughout the period since the Harare Assembly – interfaith education and holistic education. Neither Christian nurture in the churches nor education in our societies can be undertaken in a way that ignores other faiths. For our own spiritual health and the peace of the world, we need to learn about one another and with one another. Our research project is a first step to learning good practices from one another. If learning or formation is to be truly ecumenical, it has to be holistic. The Holistic Education Resource Book: Learning and Teaching in an Ecumenical Context has encouraged many to consider how their learning can be holistic.*

*We hope you will see this last issue of EEF-NET not as a collection of reports but the opening of the way to new impetuses in ecumenical formation – for the renewal of the churches and the ecumenical movement.*

*The education and ecumenical formation staff of the WCC*

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## “God, in your Grace, Transform the World”

### *Message of the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches: An Invitation to Prayer*

Sisters and brothers, we greet you in Christ. As representatives of churches from all the world's regions, we gather in Porto Alegre, Brazil, meeting in the first decade of the third millennium, in the first assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Latin America. We have been invited here to join in a *feira da vida*, the feast of life. We are praying, reflecting on the scriptures, struggling and rejoicing together in our unity and diversity, and seeking to listen carefully to one another in the spirit of consensus.

Meeting in February 2006, we are made aware by Assembly participants of cries arising daily in their home countries and regions due to disasters, violent conflicts and conditions of oppression and suffering. Yet we are also empowered by God to bear witness to transformation in personal lives, churches, societies and the world as a whole.

Specific challenges and calls to action are being communicated to the churches and the world in the reports and decisions of the Assembly, such as: the quest for Christian unity; our mid-term call to recommitment to the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010); discernment of prophetic and programmatic means to achieve global economic justice; engagement in inter-religious dialogue; full inter-generational participation of all women and men, and common statements addressing the churches and the world on public issues.

The theme of this Ninth Assembly is a prayer, “God, in your grace, transform the world”. In prayer our hearts are transformed, and so we offer our message as prayer:

*God of grace,*

together we turn to you in prayer, for it is you who unite us:

you are the one God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - in whom we believe,

you alone empower us for good,

you send us out across the earth in mission and service in the name of Christ.

We confess before you and all people :

We have been unworthy servants.

We have misused and abused the creation.

We have wounded one another by divisions everywhere.

We have often failed to take decisive action against environmental destruction,

poverty, racism, caste-ism, war and genocide.

We are not only victims but also perpetrators of violence.

In all this, we have fallen short as disciples of Jesus Christ

who in his incarnation came to save us and teach us how to love.

Forgive us, God, and teach us to forgive one another.

*God, in your grace, transform the world.*

God, hear the cries of all creation,  
the cries of the waters, the air, the land and  
all living things;  
the cries of all who are exploited,  
marginalised, abused and victimized,  
all who are dispossessed and silenced, their  
humanity ignored,  
all who suffer from any form of disease, from  
war  
and from the crimes of the arrogant who hide  
from the truth,  
distort memory and deny the possibility of  
reconciliation.  
God, guide all in seats of authority towards  
decisions of moral integrity.

*God, in your grace, transform the world.*

We give thanks for your blessings and signs  
of hope that are already present in the  
world,  
in people of all ages and in those who have  
gone before us in faith;  
in movements to overcome violence in all  
its forms, not just for a decade but for  
always;  
in the deep and open dialogues that have  
begun both within our own churches and with  
those of other faiths in the search for mutual  
understanding and respect;  
in all those working together for justice and  
peace -  
both in exceptional circumstances and every  
day.  
We thank you for the good news of Jesus  
Christ, and the assurance of resurrection.

*God, in your grace, transform the world.*

By the power and guidance of your Holy  
Spirit, O God,  
may our prayers never be empty words  
but an urgent response to your living Word -  
in non-violent direct action for positive  
change,  
in bold, clear, specific acts of solidarity,  
liberation, healing and compassion,  
readily sharing the good news of Jesus  
Christ.  
Open our hearts to love and to see that all  
people are made in your image,  
to care for creation and affirm life in all its  
wondrous diversity.  
Transform us in the offering of ourselves so  
that we may be your partners in transforma-  
tion  
to strive for the full, visible unity of the one  
Church of Jesus Christ,  
to become neighbours to all,  
as we await with eager longing the full  
revelation of your rule  
in the coming of a new heaven and a new  
earth.

*God, in your grace, transform the world.  
In the name of the Father, Son and Holy  
Spirit;*

*Amen.*

*WCC 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly – Ecumenical Conversation Number 10*

## *Memories and Renewed Quest for Ecumenical Formation*

*Twenty two Ecumenical Conversations, which took place in three morning sessions on consecutive days, gave delegates an opportunity to reflect on the common challenges facing the churches today. The expectation was that from sharing different experiences and actions, joys, frustrations, achievements and failures, Christians from different parts of the world would learn from one another and strengthen their fellowship and commitment to stay and act together for the renewal and transformation of the churches and of the world. The following is the report on the Ecumenical Conversation on ecumenical formation.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the major achievements in Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the coming and staying together of some major church traditions that have witnessed the development and growth of the ecumenical movement. This rich legacy of churches staying and working together towards the visible unity of the church could not have been possible without intentional and dynamic ecumenical formation and learning that have taken place in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, we live in a diverse and rapidly changing ecclesial and ecumenical context. Some of us have come to the assembly with deep memories of how we have been ecumenically formed. Others may be wondering what it means to be “ecumenical” and hence what is “ecumenical formation”? Still others are actively and intentionally involved in nurturing ecumenical consciousness as they confront the growing reality of religious pluralism and different kinds of injustices in their context. Moreover in the scriptures we are admonished to be transformed by the

renewal of our minds by discerning the will of God (Romans 12:2) and to seek God's grace.

Ecumenical formation does not happen in a vacuum. The context, human condition and people's experiences influence different kinds of initiatives in ecumenical formation. Major changes in ecumenism, demographic shift in global Christianity, post-denominationalism, religious plurality and interfaith education, call for an ecumenical conversation. In addition, rapid growth of new ways of expressing Christian spirituality and proselytism, in some places, create renewed quest for exploring creative ways of doing ecumenical formation and to redefine our understanding of ecumenism and transformation.

Churches, in different contexts, need to learn from one another and to articulate for themselves what it means to be ecumenical in relation to the gospel message of a just world and the reign of God.

## THE ECUMENICAL CONVERSATION

### 1. Our Ecumenical Formation

The focus of the first session was to recall into memory how some of the participants have been ecumenically formed in different contexts and how that has shaped their understanding of ecumenical formation.

**Prof. Rodney L. Petersen** - introduced the topic by recalling his background and the factors that influenced his ecumenical formation : a knowledge of the biblical story, the importance of theological literacy, the importance of community and conversation.

Five major themes emerged from the discussion:

- **Background:** In recalling personal stories all group members spoke about the impact of family and of the socializing influence of schools and traditions which played an important role in ecumenical formation. Participants discussed also the choices children are making in response to the influence of older generation, for example when matters such as church attendance were a decision of their parents. There was a discussion about post-modern tendency of children deciding themselves their church attendance and consequently not being exposed early to religious ideas and by extension to ecumenical formation.
- **Opportunity:** It was noted that the opportunity to meet with persons within their own context provided a better basis for dialoguing with people from other contexts.

- **Attitude:** It was agreed that openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be challenged are important characteristics for ecumenical formation.
- **Conversation:** Conversation was understood as a mean to get to know each other's personal story, faith and tradition. The way people are seen in contexts of majority versus minority also creates opportunity for ecumenical formation of people.
- **Tools for articulating a shared vision with the diversity of interpretation of the biblical tradition** (hermeneutics). Having the right theological tool was seen as necessary for ecumenical formation.

### 2. Ecumenical Formation today

The second session gave an opportunity for exploring how Christians are engaged in ecumenical formation today and the major challenges they face in their context.

**Dr Hope S. Antone** - against the background of a pluralistic Asian society, illustrated some paradigm shifts which are required for ecumenical formation today:

- From competition to cooperation among the religions;
- From isolation to collaboration with civil society;
- From disintegration to integrity of creation;
- From condemnation of others to dialogue;
- From theology disconnected to reality to contextual theology.

The group discussion highlighted some positive experiences related to the process of ecumenical formation:

- Vibrant Student Movements, particularly SCM addressing issues of concern to young people;
- Ecumenical theological training- notably in Orthodox context;
- Interfaith meetings;
- Ecumenical chaplaincies and agencies.

In assessing the conversation on these topics it was clear that the participants felt that much more could be done to strengthen the ecumenical movement through training and leadership development. Examples given were: to undertake/facilitate theological conversation among people of different traditions; to empower the laity to embrace ecumenism in life and practice; to organize intentional leadership development programmes tacking into account appropriate ecumenical formation according to age and level of education; to strengthen the commitment of leadership in the ecumenical quest.

A participant expressed a fear that his church was so ecumenical that it was losing its institutional identity by merging with another denomination!. Some others shared similar apprehension: some church leaders, afraid of their church being “submerged” by others, would not recognize and lift up what can be gained with ecumenical cooperation.

### **3. Ecumenical Formation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The third session focussed on identifying the spirit of renewal and transformation in the church that could be the basis of creat-

ing realistic models of ecumenical formation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in different contexts.

***Ms Anastasia Vassiliadou*** - introduced the discussion by pointing out that the formation of an ecumenical spirit needed to reach both the personal and the institutional levels. The energy to undertake and to renew ecumenical formation can be found today in the young generations. For them, it is easier to adopt ecumenical formation based on “common issues” rather than on doctrinal orientations.

In the discussion, participants confirmed the tendency to prioritize an “ecumenism of life”, and noticed that students groups, women’s groups, celebrations of common prayers were contributing to bring new energy into the ecumenical formation.

In looking at new models of ecumenical formation for the future, participants suggested that they should respond to three major needs:

- The need to establish the conditions for intensive dialogue with Pentecostals, moving from condemnation to dialogue, from competition to cooperation;
- The need to better integrate the youth expectations and to listen to their point of view;
- The need to develop an holistic approach in doing theological education, taking into account both contextual and spiritual dimensions.

Finally, participants agreed that the WCC’s role was very much needed to provide expertise and to help churches deal with the pluralist contexts in which they have to form the new generations.

## *Young Ecumenists Group - A Collaborative Community*

The Young Ecumenists Group (YEG) was the brainchild of the WCC Scholarships Programme, which towards the end of 2004, began to plan how best to contribute to the WCC 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The Scholarships programme had enabled the participation of individual young adults at previous assemblies. This time as a commitment to the vision of the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly as a 'Youth Assembly,' and in recognition of the formation opportunities that the assembly offered, the programme gathered 25 participants from around the world as part of a unique ecumenical formation training initiative.

The participants came from a wide range of confessional families and were identified as emerging ecumenists and leaders from the churches and the church-related networks they represented. They came endorsed by various Scholarships Programme partners including: member churches, regional ecumenical organisations, World Student Christian Federation, OIKOSNET, Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network, Young Missiologists Group etc. The group also included ex-WCC scholars, as well as former interns of the WCC.

The concept for the group-training project was to develop a collaborative community of learning that integrated various communication technologies with face-to-face learning encounters. It was decided that the training would be divided into 3 parts:

- a preparatory 6 months learning initiative via internet (community building, critical reflection on assembly issues, sharing of regional realities)
- assembly participation (immersion in all aspects of the assembly, including Mutirão, ecumenical conversations, bible study, plenaries etc)
- a 6-month follow up (evaluation and possible production of a learning resource).

The preparatory process prior to the assembly was launched via a website in September 2005. After initial introductions to group members and some online community building, a reflection process took place around assembly related issues, including some bible study. Part of the concept behind the training initiative, was to allow the YEG participants a space to engage in critical reflection on issues and themes of significance to the churches and the ecumenical movement; to share local experience; and to explore ideas for the future. This was done both online and at the assembly itself.

The YEG at the assembly was also an opportunity to promote ecumenical formation and leadership development, in a setting in which worship and spiritual reflection was an integral part of the process. For this reason YEG participants were encouraged to actively immerse themselves into the life and rhythm of the Assembly. This they did with an enthusiasm and commitment

that was pleasing to see. Most of the YEG participants had significant roles in the different components of the Assembly programme, the following of which are just a sample:

- leadership in the Indigenous Peoples Pre-Assembly gathering
- leadership in the Youth Pre-Assembly gathering
- participation in the Womens Pre-Assembly and EDAN gatherings
- leadership in a range of Mutirão workshop offerings (e.g. 'Transforming Secularised and Urbanised Societies;' 'Tamar Campaign' 'Dialogue for Peaceful Change' 'Land and Cultural Rights for Indigenous Peoples' 'E-learning Communities, New Ways of Being Ecumenical' 'Island of Hope')
- participation in numerous Mutirão workshops – either as area of interest, or in solidarity with other YEG participants
- guests speakers for the Bate Bapo e.g. 'Human Rights in the Middle East'
- leadership in the three Ecumenical Formation seminars
- leadership in Bible study and participation in the english speaking Mutirão bible study
- guest speakers in Assembly Plenaries e.g. Church Unity
- guest speakers in Ecumenical Conversations e.g. Co-existence in God's Creation; Caring for the Earth's Resources

- leadership in worship and prayer (both as individuals and as part of interest group or regional contributions)
- participation in Regional Meetings

The task now is focused on how best to extend relationships and learning from the Assembly face-to-face encounter. In a post assembly community a forum for sharing around specific issues of interest, advocacy and solidarity around regional realities, has had some success. Although the website is now closed down, the group maintains regular contact through email and a number of original YEG participants have now been selected for WCC consultative bodies, usually in their areas of specialisation. As a result of 'word of mouth' profiling of the group, other young 'ecumenists' have asked to join and have been welcomed into the growing network. A 'Young Ecumenists in the Pacific' group has also been established.

It is hoped that in the future the network will continue to grow and a 'community' of young ecumenists with common interests and goals will be seen to provide a positive contribution to the worldwide ecumenical movement.

## What can we learn from the Mutirão?

Simon Oxley

The 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly said many things, some of which you can read in the documents reproduced in this issue of EEF-NET. They will guide the work of the WCC and, hopefully, inspire and encourage the whole ecumenical movement. The record of the assembly in image and sound as well as word is an essential tool for shaping the future. An analysis of what we can learn from the actual experience is also vital if the assembly is to be transformational. This article reflects on what we can learn from the Mutirão from the perspective of a WCC staff member.

In the evaluations of the assembly we have received a great deal of positive feedback from those who participated in the Mutirão. They spoke warmly of the opportunities to encounter, engage and reflect. If there was a criticism, it was of too much choice. Each participant's view of the Mutirão would be different as each would have had their own set of experiences. This article can give an overview and some analysis but it cannot convey those deep moments experienced by individual participants.

The WCC has a habit of adopting words from the host culture as a title for activities in major events. There is always some discussion as to whether this is a respectful use of the word. For the Harare assembly, for example, we used *padare* to describe workshops offered in a themed programme. As the planning for the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly began there was talk of *officinas* – workshops. Many thought that this was too prosaic and that we needed a word which had a more creative and dynamic feel and one which would include many different kinds of activi-

ties. We found this in the word *mutirão* and added a sub-title 'Coming together to make a difference'.

The brochure described it thus:

The word *Mutirão* comes from a Brazilian word meaning a meeting place, an opportunity to work together for a common purpose, a space to discuss and argue with each other in building a common dream. In Brazil, for example, people in poor communities sometimes "make a *mutirão*" to build a house together. They ensure that there is the needed expertise on how to build a house and then the community joins in to work together to realize a common, concrete objective.

The *Mutirão* at the Assembly will provide a space for reflection, celebration, and exhibits. A full programme will provide a rich array of offerings on many different issues, organized by churches and related organizations in all parts of the world.

One of WCC's aspirations for the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly was that it would be an ecumenical formation experience for participants. My own interpretation of that was that it should be more than an opportunity for participants to learn *about* the working and concerns of the ecumenical movement in general and the WCC specifically. It should be an opportunity to *become* ecumenical in their understanding, sympathy, relationships and commitment, leading to ecumenical action. If you like, participation in the assembly would be a process of conscientisation – a concept WCC learned from the great Brazilian

educator, Paulo Freire, when he worked with us. We could say that without conscientisation there cannot be transformation.

The Murirão was a space that surrounded and was within the programme for the Assembly delegates. It was not simply the visitors' programme of former assemblies nor was it a workshop and exhibition programme as in Harare. It did include such elements but was more. The detailed planning for the Mutirão was undertaken by a Geneva staff team in close collaboration with a Latin American working group and the local organisers so that there was a strong input from the regional context of the assembly as well as a global dimension. This partnership was successful in both the preparatory stages and in Porto Alegre to a degree for which we had not dared hope. One of the keys to this may be that the WCC's lack of capacity to do everything meant that we had to trust our partners rather than control them.

We invited people to apply to offer workshops in the Mutirão. The purpose of these was to explore an issue using participants' experience rather than to promote particular organisations. Agencies and issue-based networks were quick to respond, probably because they were accustomed to doing so for events like the World Social Forum. Others required some prompting in order to fill gaps that we identified. It was noticeable that churches per se did not tend to offer workshops even though they were invited. In Porto Alegre several church representatives remarked that they could have made a contribution had they thought about it.

Our philosophy was to offer spaces for workshops and let the organisers do them in their own way. However, we were proactive in requesting those who offered the same theme to work together on a joint workshop. This set up some positive collaborations

between people who had never worked together before. Unfortunately, some could not rise to this challenge. We asked people to think beyond panel discussions and Powerpoint presentations to more creative and engaging styles of engagement. As well as encouraging an emphasis on participation rather than presentation in the workshops, we asked organisers to indicate the potential for the involvement of youth. One response was that youth would set up the room – moving table and chairs was not exactly what we had in mind!

In Porto Alegre participants were confronted with a workshop programme that engaged with almost every area of concern to the ecumenical movement – the challenges that confront humanity and those specific to the churches. It would not be very informative to list all the themes of the workshops but that information is available should anyone be interested in doing some research. The most frequently addressed single issue was HIV/AIDS. As the evaluation sheets for these particular workshops indicated very similar outcomes about the needs and the involvement of the ecumenical movement, we might draw the conclusion that we should have reduced their number by further mergers. However, to have done that could have been to reduce the focus on an area that presents deep theological and humanitarian challenges.

The largest number of workshops were on offer at lunchtimes each day when most people, delegates included, were free to attend. There were also a smaller range of workshops running parallel to most plenary sessions. The majority of workshops were full to overflowing and the evaluations produced indicated that almost all were highly participative. Most of them were held in a large building composed almost entirely of seminar rooms. This eased organisational logistics and made it simple for participants to locate their workshop. Equally importantly it gave the psychological focus of a com-

mon open space in which there were many more focused spaces.

The variety of workshop themes was reflected in the Mutirão exhibition space which was well situated outside the plenary hall. This area was a space of gathering before and after sessions which meant a high level of engagement between exhibitors and other Assembly participants. It could be said that the exhibitions per se were not so significant as the opportunity they created for conversation. Display panels and leaflets may inform but are unlikely to transform. Talking to those responsible for exhibits, there was excitement about the encounters they had had with the other participants.

Following the daily morning prayer, the delegates and other appointed representatives were involved in Bible study and reflection on the assembly experience in small groups. The Mutirão was faced with having to providing Bible study for a considerably larger number of people in the plenary hall and two lecture theatres. Portuguese and Spanish speakers each had their own sessions. For the English (plus other languages) Bible studies in the plenary hall there was an initial temptation to plan a series of lectures. However, we were able to bring together a denominationally and regionally diverse group of facilitators. Their experience enabled us to use the space in a way that imaginatively engaged the participants through the use of music and video clips as well as the spoken word and set up an interactive small group process in the hall.

A similar challenge was faced in the plenary hall for the three Mutirão ecumenical formation sessions which took place at the same times as the Ecumenical Conversations in the programme for delegates. While the workshops were mainly focussed on the work of the ecumenical movement, these

sessions were planned to help participants understand ecumenism and develop their commitment to being ecumenical. We developed a participative process which created opportunities for participants to reflect on their own ecumenical experience and listen to one another. Three case studies were offered that illustrated different forms of ecumenism, uniting churches and ecumenical social action. The sessions were facilitated by four young women which is an interesting statement in itself.

It is often the experience of large events that series of things like the Mutirão Bible studies or the ecumenical formation sessions see a drop off in attendance as time goes on. This was not our experience in Porto Alegre which I believe is an indication of the value participants placed on the possibility for interaction they provided.

In the first part of each lunch break there was an event called *Bate papo*, meaning to chat with. This was an evolution from the starting point that we would have on campus several well known personalities. Participants would welcome an opportunity to listen to them outside the programme of the plenary hall. However, as we looked at the list we saw older people, mainly men. How could we honour the intent to make an Assembly with an accent on youth? If we included some young adults in this list, would participants come to listen to them? The concept of the *Bate papo* came as we recognised that we could set up a series of conversations between younger and older ecumenists. This format proved to be creative.

There were many dedicated spaces in which people could gather. One of these was the *Café Teológico* (Theological Café). For some, especially those not familiar with the idea of an internet café, the concept was confusing. The reality was more straightfor-

ward. The Café Teológico was organised by the Brazilian Association of Theological Schools (ASTE) together with the Association of Ecumenical Theological Schools in Latin America and the Caribbean (CETELA) and the Ecumenical Bible Institute (CEBI). The Café did serve coffee as well as a series of book presentations and discussions with the author and round table conversations on theological issues. This space provided an ecumenical focal point for Latin American theological educators and drew in those from other regions.

In his Report, the General Secretary spoke of the  *festa da vida*  – the feast of life. The Mutirão cultural presentations captured that spirit. Music, dance and drama in various places on the campus offered another way of engaging as well as adding to the vitality of the assembly. In spite of the ecumenical movement's concentration on the cognitive in our discussion and conversations, we should never underestimate the power of the affective in forming us ecumenically.

Working on the Mutirão was one of the best experience I have had in my ten years with the WCC. It gave an opportunity to work with WCC colleagues who I knew but had never worked with before. One hopes that this really will be the style of the post-Porto Alegre WCC. It was enriching to be with the volunteers from Brazil and the rest of Latin America and the WCC interns and the stewards who together made the Mutirão work. At the end of assembly debriefing we held for the stewards, I was touched by the deep way the Mutirão experience had affected them. The enthusiastic response of the participants to the Mutirão was humbling for all we had done is create the space for them to use.

What can we learn from the experience of the Mutirão? I want to make 9 comments out of my own reflections.

1. The Mutirão demonstrated the potential of creating space for people to experience, relate and learn together. The space does not need to be controlled but it does need to be structured so that it is open and creative. In the Mutirão, participants demonstrated a responsibility towards one another in their discourse. The WCC has an important global function as an ecumenical space-creator.

2. The Mutirão demonstrated a commitment and vitality in the ecumenical movement which the institutional WCC has not always reflected. I felt excited and energised, as did many others, by the Mutirão and I hope that it will have the same effect on the WCC as a whole. The WCC needs to use the methodology of the Mutirão to continue to draw on and encourage that vitality.

3. The Mutirão demonstrated that having limited resources can open the way to creative partnerships. Having a sufficiency of resources can lead of a mentality of having a sufficiency of thinking – an attitude that says 'if you want to work with us you have to do it our way'. We could not have provided the Mutirão without real and trusting collaboration with partners. It was a richer experience for their thinking as well as their labour.

4. The Mutirão demonstrated that we need a holistic approach to ecumenical formation. The power of the ecumenical movement comes from people who are engaged, excited and committed. Transformation requires inspiration as well as information.

5. The Mutirão demonstrated that young adults can exercise enabling skills and offer leadership to all generations and not just their own. Ecumenical formation is not just the young learning from the old but the old learning from the young and all learning together.

6. The Mutirão demonstrated how with imagination one can overcome the physical constraints of rooms and halls to produce creative and involving sessions. Just because a room was designed for someone to speak to an audience sitting in front of them does not mean that we have to use it only in that way. The limitations are not of bricks and mortar, chairs and tables but of our imaginations.

7. The response to the invitation to offer workshops, exhibitions and cultural events indicates that we need to do more work on involving the churches on a future occasion. The Mutirão would have been the richer for more church participation alongside agencies, networks and the like. Expressions of regret by church representatives on an opportunity missed may be forgotten. The WCC should remember.

8. There was criticism that the Mutirão did not influence the formal assembly. As a statement of process that is true. From the beginning we had tried to stress that participation in the Mutirão in whatever way, by offering workshops and events or by attending, had a value in itself – that this kind of participation is the way the ecumenical builds itself up and sustains itself. However we had also planned some strategies by which insights could be fed into the formal assembly. The only one that really functioned was a wall by the plenary hall with messages ‘From the Mutirão to the Assembly’. How effective that was is open to question. One of the creative strengths of the Mutirão was its freedom and openness. Had it been tied more closely to the formal assembly programme, each workshop and other event would have been subject to the controls, the checks and balances, that were applied to the plenary sessions and Ecumenical Conversations. There is, anyway, a question as to whether the real strength of an assembly lies in the decisions and statements it makes

or in the effect its whole life has on the delegates and through them on the churches. This is an issue that will remain with us.

9. The self-criticism I would make is that I fear that participants went away from the Mutirão with many undifferentiated experiences, ideas and challenges - each one interesting and exciting but all jumbled together. They may have returned home with good ecumenical ‘travellers tales’ of people they met and things they learnt. Enthused but confused. What we did not do, as we all too often do not, is to give participants opportunity to reflect on their experiences together, to integrate and internalise them. I think that this is particularly serious in the light of the assembly theme – God, in your grace, transform the world. Transformation does not happen simply because people have new experiences, learn new things or meet new people. Something has to happen to integrate those to transform ways of knowing, relating, acting and believing. We should not arrogate to ourselves the work of the Holy Spirit but we should use the wisdom we have to create the right spaces for transformation to take place.

Sometimes I think that our understandable seriousness and ‘ecumenical correctness’ draws the life out of the ecumenical movement. The *joie de vivre* of the *feira da vida*, if it is permissible to mix languages, is not always apparent. So the final word should be given to the participant who wrote about one of the Mutirão workshops. After commenting on the creative and relaxed atmosphere and the participation of people of different ethnicities, gender and position, they wrote ‘A lot of laughter – the ecumenical movement can be FUN’.

*Simon Oxley was co-moderator of the WCC staff group responsible for the Mutirão. A version of this article appeared in Ecumenical Review, Vol.58 No 1&2, January/April 2006.*

# WCC 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly

## Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee

The following are extracts from the Report. The full version can be found on <http://www.wccassembly.info>

### II. The Context of Our Work

6. The Porto Alegre Assembly has taken place against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world. It is on this stage, even as the drama of changing contexts unfolds, that the churches are called to fulfill their mission and calling. Changes are taking place everywhere, and all are related: the changing ecclesial and ecumenical contexts (including church geography, statistics, and secularization), as well as the changing political, economic and social contexts (including growing inequalities, environmental destruction, migration, violence and terror). These changes present immense challenges to the churches and to the WCC that call for courageous visions of hope and greater commitment to make visible God's gift of unity and reconciliation in Christ before our divided churches, societies, and world. We were greatly encouraged by how our Latin American hosts presented their history of struggle and hope in responding to the challenges their continent is facing. However, concerns were expressed about the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and Afrodescendants in the life of the church and in society in Latin America.

7. We have been reminded that, "A divided church cannot have a credible witness in a broken world; it cannot stand against the disintegrating and disorienting forces of

globalization and enter into meaningful dialogue with the world" (Moderator's Report, Para 17). We turn to God and pray, "God, in your grace, transform our lives, our churches, our nations and world". All programmes and activities of the WCC are thus to be responsive to this changing context in seeking to be a faithful expression of God's justice, peace, care for creation, healing, reconciliation and salvation: the "fullness" of life for all.

### III. Our Vision and Our Goals

8. In its work at this first WCC Assembly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the PGC reaffirmed the stated purpose and functions of the WCC (as expressed in the Constitution, para. III.) as the basis for its work: "*The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.*" In addition, that paragraph affirms as goals of the Council that it will:

- promote the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation in a spirit of mutual accountability, the development of deeper relationships through theological dialogue and the sharing of human,

spiritual and material resources with one another;

- facilitate common witness; express their commitment to diakonia in serving human need;
- nurture the growth of an ecumenical consciousness;
- assist each other in relationships to and with people of other faiths; and,
- foster renewal and growth through unity, worship, mission and service.

#### **IV. Guiding Principles and Methodological Recommendations**

11. Building upon the very helpful material and recommendations in the “Programme Evaluation Report from the 2005 Central Committee” (referred to in *From Harare to Porto Alegre*, pp.203-216), and receiving a strong and sobering recommendation from the Finance Committee of this Assembly related to the anticipated financial situation of the WCC in the coming years, the PGC identified seven basic principles to guide the WCC in setting its programme priorities in the future:

- to keep its focus upon what the WCC uniquely might do as a global fellowship of churches in providing leadership to the whole of the ecumenical movement;
- to do less, to do it well, in an integrated, collaborative and interactive approach;
- to lift up its central task of the churches calling one another to visible unity;
- to keep in tension the work of dialogue and advocacy, of building relationships

and promoting social witness among churches and with different sectors in society;

- to foster greater ownership and participation by the churches in building as much as possible on initiatives of the churches and partner organizations;
- to bring a prophetic voice and witness to the world in addressing the urgent and turbulent issues of our times in a focused way;
- to communicate WCC activities to the churches and the world in a timely and imaginative way.

12. The PGC also identified several methodological elements in defining how future WCC life and work would be carried out, including:

- articulating a clear theological basis for all of its work;
- developing a comprehensive planning, monitoring and evaluation process that will include a clear time-line and goals;
- designing a strategy for communication, engagement and ownership by the churches;
- facilitating the coordinating role of the WCC in seeking partnerships in networking and advocacy with other ecumenical organizations, including Christian World Communions, REOs, NCCs, Specialized Ministries, faith-based organizations, and NGOs (as appropriate) – with the hope that many of these programmes can be implemented in collaborative ways of working;
- encouraging capacity-building of member churches and ecumenical partners;

- accompanying churches and peoples in critical situations and enabling and facilitating their action.

Resolution:

13. The Ninth Assembly *endorses* these guiding principles and methodological elements as the basis for establishing the Council's future programme priorities.

## **V. Major Areas of Engagement**

14. In light of the changing context, the vision and purpose of the WCC, and the guiding principles and methodological elements, the PGC offers four major interactive "areas of engagement" for shaping the future life and work of the Council. Each of these emphases is already reflected in the current programmes of the WCC. What is being proposed here is that there be greater integration among the programmes and standing Commissions (Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, International Affairs), while exploring greater collaboration with current ecumenical partners and specialized ministries in development of these emphases in the future.

15. Three additional words of introduction to these areas of engagement:

- The PGC strongly endorses promoting ecumenical leadership development of youth in the life of the WCC, including the full participation of youth in all programmes of the WCC. Their voices, concerns and presence must be brought more directly into the decision-making and leadership of the work and governance of the Council.
- The PGC continues to affirm and celebrate the role and contributions of

women in all areas and arenas in the life of the WCC, and endorses the continued participation of women in the whole of the WCC.

- The PGC urges that the WCC seek the full inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and Dalits, people of African descent, persons with disabilities and marginalized people all over the world in its life, work and decision-making.

*The four major areas proposed by the Committee are - Unity, Spirituality and Mission; Ecumenical Formation; Global Justice; Public Voice and Prophetic Witness to the World.*

## **Ecumenical Formation**

18. One of the issues that challenges the whole of the ecumenical movement today is that of ecumenical formation. As reported by the General Secretary in his report to this Assembly, "If contemporary Christians, including the church leadership, are to participate creatively and responsibly in the search for unity, and grow together, appropriate means of ecumenical formation must be offered to enable better, richer contributions to our common life." This is especially true for the students, young adults, laity and women in our churches as they increasingly take on leadership roles in the ecumenical movement for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

19. The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey of the WCC was highlighted as a model for ecumenical formation, especially in its efforts in recent years in expanding its programme to include evangelicals and Pentecostals in its courses and seminars, as well as reaching out to provide greater inter-religious encounter. Providing a platform for churches and ecumenical partners

working on challenges of science and technology to faith in cooperation with other parts of the WCC could be another opportunity. These trends are suggestive of the way forward, and a cause of hope.

20. Ecumenical formation also includes the role of the WCC in creating “safe spaces” for cross-cultural and cross-theological encounter as to engage in honest encounter around issues that divide our churches and our communities, in particular, to continue the dialogue on issues such as family life and human sexuality. related to human sexuality.

Resolution:

25. The Ninth Assembly *affirms* these four areas of engagement in shaping the WCC’s future life and work.

Resolution:

26. In particular, in regard to specific programme areas that have been identified in pursuing these four “areas of engagement”, the Ninth Assembly:

- *affirms* that comprehensive attention be given to unity, spirituality, and mission, both theologically and practically. The WCC and its member churches are encouraged to address the sharp ecclesiological questions set out in the report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, and to give priority to the questions of unity, catholicity, baptism and prayer.
- *encourages* churches on local, national, regional and global levels to commit themselves to the task of continuing ecumenical formation for all. In this role, the WCC should facilitate and initiate

dialogue and possible cooperation between religious and political actors on the role of the church in civil society and between religions in areas of mutual understanding.

- *affirms* that a follow-up of the AGAPE process be undertaken and expanded, in collaboration with other ecumenical partners and organizations, to engage in (1) the work of theological reflection on these issues that arise out of the center of our faith; (2) solid political, economic and social analysis; (3) on-going dialogue between religious, and economic and political actors; and (4) sharing practical, positive approaches from the churches.
- in looking to the second second half of the DOV, *endorses* that the regional foci be continued; that more sharing of successful examples be developed to encourage churches and local congregations to respond to overcoming violence in their own contexts supported by international mutual visits; that a process of wide consultation be undertaken towards developing an ecumenical declaration on “just peace”; and finally, that the conclusion of the DOV be marked by an international Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

## *The Development of WCC Programme Plans 2007-2013*

Following the Assembly, the general secretary organised staff to work in groups drawn from across the different programmes to frame a Programme Plan. The Assembly had given some clear direction on focusing on what only the WCC can do, on the churches calling one another to visible unity, on holding the various emphases in the work of the WCC together, on fostering ownership and participation by the churches and on addressing the issues of the day. This is to be done in a way that the WCC does less, does it well and with an integrated, collaborative and interactive approach.

The Programme Plan presented to the Central Committee in August/September envisaged six programmes, each with a limited number of projects and activities. It was proposed that staff would work on more than one project and often in more than one programme area. This was designed to encourage collaborative approaches and to avoid the compartmentalised of work. More activities would be done in collaboration with churches and ecumenical partners. The proposals were basically affirmed by the Central Committee with some amendments and suggestions for further developments.

The six programmes are now:

### **1 WCC and the Ecumenical Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

This will include: interpreting and communicating the ecumenical vision of the WCC; a global platform to theology and analysis; nurturing relationships with member

churches; partnerships with the ecumenical organisations; the participation of youth and women's concerns.

### **2 Unity, Mission, Evangelism and Spirituality**

This will include: work on the unity of the church; spirituality and worship; ecumenical perspectives on mission and unity; inclusive communities.

### **3 Public Witness, Addressing Power, Affirming Peace**

This will include: the Decade to Overcome Violence; global advocacy for justice and accountability; human rights; solidarity and witness with the churches in the Middle East; the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel; poverty wealth and ecology

### **4 Justice and Diakonia**

This will include: ecumenical solidarity; mutual accountability; migration and social justice; faith science and technology; climate change mortar: health and healing: the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa

### **5 Education and Ecumenical Formation**

This programme integrates the work of the former Education and Ecumenical Formation team, the Bossey Ecumenical Institute and the WCC Library and archives. A proposal that the programme be entitled

Ecumenical and Faith Formation was not immediately acceptable to the Central Committee. However, the programme proposal understands that ecumenical formation cannot be separate from or in tension with the Christian nurture that takes place within the churches. More work has to be done on the form this integration will take but the programme will include the kind of ecumenical formation undertaken by Bossey, networking with those who already support and offer ecumenical formation, the scholarships programme and supporting ecumenical theological education.

## **6 Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation**

This includes: strengthening intra-religious trust and respect: Christian self-

understanding among many religions; accompanying churches in situations of conflict.

The programmes are complemented by Communications and the Finance Services, IT and Administration.

The programmes will be advised by four Commissions – Faith and Order; World Mission and Evangelism; International Affairs (this incorporates the former CCIA, JPC, Diakonia and Inter-religious advisory bodies); Education and Ecumenical Formation (a definitive name will be chosen by the Commission; this integrates the former EEF Commission and the Bossey Board).

# *Interfaith Education Project - Summary Report*

*Christy Lohr*

*This report brings the results of the online survey described in EEF-NET No 17, December 2005*

Responding to a growing interest in interfaith education, the leadership of Interreligious Relations & Dialogue (IRD) and Education & Ecumenical Formation (EEF) convened a small working group to design an Interfaith Education Project (IEP) project to further the WCC's commitment to promoting interreligious education within the member churches.

The ultimate objective of the IEP is to produce a resource that will assist educators in faith communities and in education systems to develop interfaith education appropriate to their context. Because the project aims to build on existing experience and reflection from the WCC, the initial phase of the project researched current initiatives in interfaith education. There was a particular concern to identify a) examples of practice which had a positive impact and, b) key issues which enabled or hindered the development of interfaith education.

This first phase of the project built a database of individuals and organizations engaged in interfaith education to be polled with a survey instrument about their work in the field.

Phase two launched a survey on interfaith education designed with the assistance of Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research (HIRR). The survey gauged the extent to which interfaith education is a

priority among members of the WCC's network and determined the types of work currently being executed.

## **Participant demographics**

Results from the survey point to a variety of interfaith educational initiatives taking place worldwide. Respondents represented interfaith activities in over forty-five countries.

Christian groups, more specifically Protestant denominations, comprised the highest religious affiliation with educational sites. By and large, most programs were created to strengthen, introduce or bring about greater interreligious understanding on the part of clergy and lay people.

The majority of responses related to programs directed to young adults - individuals between the ages of 19 to 30. Programs tended to be targeted toward a Christian audience, and of those, the majority were Protestant with some Catholic participation and less than 10% involvement of Orthodox Christians.

The most frequently listed educational goal of programs was, overwhelmingly, "to promote intercultural/interfaith understanding and dialogue", followed by "conflict transformation" or "peace-building/justice and equality".

The local context of such programming was the ultimate factor in determining a program's success. Factors such as funding, publicity/media, quality of leadership were listed as both obstacles to success and helpful to the work by various respondents. Despite enumerated obstacles, most respondents categorized their programs as successful, overall. Funding issues were a primary concern for maintaining initiatives. A full 90% of respondents indicated that their programs are still in operation.

### **Resources used and lacking**

While programs represented wide diversity in format and style, primarily, the programs surveyed used a topical lecture/workshop/dialogue model. Site visits were also a very popular. Many respondents indicated that they had created their own resources to facilitate this work including videos, resource kits, pamphlets, interreligious calendars, posters and guidelines on religious traditions, and other printed materials. Worship and small group discussions, or "encounter sessions" were also popular.

Respondents listed numerous needs that were not being met in the resources currently available to them. A general lack of knowledge/know how in leadership was expressed. A common complaint revolved around the limitations of current texts as no one text covers all educational needs. It was noted that resources should also consider a two-pronged approach including both dialogue and experience.

When considering new resources many respondents asked for institutes on religious diversity, spirituality, conflict prevention and communication to train teachers and student leaders. A need exists for resources to be

translated into a variety of languages. Resources that are available on-line and in non-written formats are in demand.

### **Assembly Responses**

During the WCC's 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly a *Mutirao* on the IEP entitled *New Approaches to Inter-Religious Education* was offered. This was used as a type of focus group to present preliminary results of the IEP survey and garner additional feedback on interfaith educational work. Response to the *Mutirao* confirmed that this is a topic that is quite important to individuals in member churches. *Mutirao* participants echoed the results of the IEP survey in terms of the diversity of types of programs being offered internationally. In terms of resources needed, overall requests included training materials for interfaith educators, resources to combat proselytism, and interfaith liturgies for use in mixed-faith groups. In general, respondents asked for information that is cooperative (i.e. created in a multi-faith context), relevant to a multi-faith audience, multi-contextual and easily accessible.

### **Conclusions/Moving Forward**

It is clear from the responses that the question of interfaith education is crucial. This is an issue that is increasingly important to member churches, and it is incumbent upon the WCC to engage questions of interfaith education both to remain relevant and supportive of its members and to be taken seriously in a global context.

It will be difficult, however, to provide this support and engage this issue in a way that is universally applicable. There is great diversity in the context of interfaith

education and the resources needed. Thus, when designing a project, the WCC should be extremely clear about its audience and application.

Based on the survey and *Mutirao* responses, two concrete options emerged as possibilities for future action for Phase III of the IEP:

1) Creation a primer on facilitating interfaith educational projects with sections to address issues such as overcoming violence, gender issues, experiential learning, multifaith worship experiences, etc. The successful reception of a curriculum of this type would need to be tailored to different age levels, engage a diverse audience, be easily reproducible/translatable and made available at low-cost.

2) Creation of a training program for interfaith leaders. This would need to address basic leadership development skills for group creation and facilitation, but would also include an emphasis on interreligious training. Training individuals to facilitate programs would enhance their efforts and increase their effectiveness in their own communities. Giving such leaders instruction in the fundamentals of interfaith education would allow them to adapt the skills and resources to their own contexts and have a greater impact on their local communities.

Option #2 should be considered as the stronger course of action as it builds a network of educators who can use newly developed or enhanced skills to impact their own communities in an appropriate way.

# *Holistic Education as a Challenge for Modern Education*

*Peter Schreiner*

*This article is based on a keynote lecture at the Conference of Orthodox Religious Education: Holistic Christian Education held at Valamo Lay Academy, Finland, July 2006*

## **Introduction**

The debate about holistic education takes place in a world where knowledge and ways of knowing become increasingly fragmented. In a world where education is demanded by economy and politics to prepare the labour force and citizens to fit the needs of a more and more globalized world. In a world where employment becomes more and more a luxury and where working places are cut off even where employers are making large profits. Those who defend this kind of ridiculous development always use the argument of the dynamics of international competition. This puts pressure on education. Education and training should serve the needs of economy. Life opportunities, seen from an economic perspective, are created by knowing a lot about a small area of knowledge.

Holistic education can sharpen a critical view of the prevailing dominant approach to education and can help to develop significant alternatives which serve the student and society in a meaningful way.

The purpose of Holistic Education can be seen fourfold:

1. A critique of modern education

2. Promote a new praxis of knowing, teaching and learning

3. Education for transformation

4. Affirming spirituality as being the core of life and hence central to education.

These are as basic concerns of the project of the World Council of Churches on Holistic Education that was organised from 1999 to 2005. I have been a member of the working group and one of the editors of the Holistic Education Resource Book (Schreiner, Banev, Oxley 2005).

I work in a church based institute for educational research and development sponsored by the Protestant churches in Germany and teachers as well as school associations. As part of my work I am involved in European networks of Religious Education like the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School and the Coordinating Group for Religious Education in Europe, a kind of umbrella structure for different organisations. My concerns include projects on education that takes account of religion, spiritual development and interreligious education.

In my view, developments in holistic education and developments in religious educa-

tion can be brought more closely together for mutual benefit. One of these areas deals with modes of learning.

The German scholar Helmut Peukert speaks about two different modes of learning. One mode of learning adds something to an already existing scaffold of knowledge and orientation and another mode transforms in a radical sense our perspective of reality and our self-understanding.

Transformation is needed when human beings and societies are in a situation of crisis. Peukert discusses a possible relationship between transformational education processes and religion. He argues for a critical approach to education and to religious education that enables the crossing of boundaries about interpretations of reality, about the Other and about oneself. Whereas the relationship between education and religion needs a more intense dialogue we can see also a similar development in approaches to holistic education. A common aim of holistic education approaches is to encourage crossing boundaries, and transformation processes.

As a first introduction to aims of holistic education, we can use the following list of key words taken from different sources of holistic education approaches. Holistic Education is about:

- Seeking wholeness
- Educating the soul
- Nourishing spirituality
- Pedagogy of universal love
- Yearning for whole communities

- A journey for a more holistic understanding of education

This can be contrasted with modernity with its key ideas of progress, objectivity, reason, certainty and personal identity. The following characteristics influence modern education:

- rapid progress and growth
- material wealth
- individual success
- technological mastery
- rationalisation
- Secularisation

Modern education inducts young people in the culture of modernity. Holistic education questions some of its basic presuppositions.

### **1. A journey from ‘either-or’ to ‘both-and’ logic**

A binary logic is at the heart of all digital forms of communication. It uses the numbers 1 and 0 arranged in different sequences to exchange information. Without binary logic we would neither have computers nor many of the gifts of modern science. This has clearly infiltrated our daily life and we cannot ignore it. But binary logic can also mislead us when it continues as the dominant philosophical orientation for our thinking and acting, especially as a basis for education. It is an example of an *either-or thinking* that has given us not only the benefits of a computerised world but also a fragmented sense of reality that destroys the wholeness and wonder of life.

Examples for *either-or thinking* are:

**Inside** versus **outside**

**Interior** versus **exterior**

**Subjective** versus **objective**

**Mind** (*The human consciousness that originates in the brain and is manifested especially in thought, perception, emotion, will, memory, and imagination*) versus **brain**

**Idealism** (*where mind is the central perspective of seeing the world*) versus **materialism** (*where matter is the dominant perspective*)

**Introspection** (*contemplation of one's own thoughts*) versus **positivism** (*where sense perceptions are the only admissible basis of human knowledge and precise thought*)

**Hermeneutics** (*the theory and methodology of interpretation of texts and reality*) versus **empiricism** (*where experience, especially of the senses, is the source of knowledge*)

These terms often represent conflicting approaches to knowledge that are often seen as disconnected.

A central task of the holistic education approaches is to deal with the tension between the existing binary logic *either – or* and in supporting an alternative logic that can be named *both-and* logic.

An integral approach based on the *both-and logic* honours and incorporates both of the mentioned parts. When we try to bring things together in the area of education philosophy we can learn from developments in other academic disciplines, theories and

approaches, where the search for a more integrated view can be found too. An example in social science is the approach of Ulrich Beck, a well known German sociologist, who has developed an alternative view on developments in the so called second modernity or reflective modernity. His approach aims to overcome the dominant binary thinking in the field of social science. Beck names his approach the *cosmopolitan* view that acknowledges the otherness of the other but also of us. Other developments took place in physical science, systems theory, ecology and related areas where the *both-and-logic* became increasingly important. Helmut Reich (physicist and social scientist) has developed a theory of Relational and Contextual Reasoning and showed that we are able to bring together two or more competing theories about the same phenomenon. We are able to think in a complementary way. Niels Bohr (1885 – 1962), physicist and Nobel Prize winner, one of the giants in the development of Quantum Mechanics, has stated the principle of complementarity: “The opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth can be another profound truth.” This quote defines a concept that is essential to thinking the world together – the concept of paradox. If we want to know what is essential, we must stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again because “We are creatures of *both* reason *and* emotion, mind *and* body, matter *and* spirit” (Riley-Taylor 2002, 67, italics in original).

Holistic education has the aim to bring these dimensions together.

## 2. A concern of Religious Educators

An integrated view is also a concern of religious educators in Europe. This can be

illustrated by quoting a paper from a European conference for RE teachers that was held in Järvenpää/Finland in 2004:

For many school systems throughout Europe the beginning of the new millennium has brought a questioning of the mechanistic and materialist approach to the planning of the curriculum that has dominated much of the recent past. There has developed an awareness of the need to educate the whole person in a more integrated way that goes beyond the narrowly cognitive. RE can make a major contribution to this process, stimulating not just the children's brains, but also their emotions, their spirits and their sense of community.

At this European conference a colleague expressed the following points on RE, spirit and spirituality:

1. The spirit should not be understood as contrasting with the body or physical nature: traditional philosophical and religious dualism is wrong. 2. RE does promote spiritual development, whether it wants to or not. 3. Most people whom we come into contact with are replaceable; pupils and teachers are irreplaceable. 4. It is spirituality that breathes life into RE.

### 3. Where is the problem? Broken Paradoxes

Parker J Palmer, teacher trainer and lecturer in Higher Education, analyses the current situation in education. He states that the world of education is filled with 'broken paradoxes':

➤ We separate *head from heart*. Result: minds that do not know how to feel and hearts that do not know how to think.

➤ We separate *facts from feelings*. Result: bloodless facts that make the world distant and remote and ignorant emotions that reduce truth to how one feels today.

➤ We separate *theory from practice*. Result: theories that have little to do with life and practice that is unformed by understanding.

➤ We separate *teaching from learning*. Result: teachers who talk but do not listen and students who listen but do not talk.' (Palmer 1998, 66)

If this is the situation we are dealing with as teachers in the classroom, how do we develop paradoxical thinking? How do we overcome either-or thinking and create both-and thinking? How do we bring things together?

We are able to bring things together. Let us try a little experiment:

Olmy srmat poelpe can raed tihs. I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh? yaeh and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt!

(Brain stuff from Cambridge University)

Holistic education works for a more integrated view: "When a person is healthy and whole, the head and the heart are both-and, not either-or, and teaching that honors that

paradox can help make us all more whole.” (Palmer 1998, 64)

The integrated view of holistic educators is based on some basic principles:

- 1) The human being is a complex existential entity
- 2) Human development occurs in a personal and in a universal and in a spiritual dimension
- 3) Spirituality should not be taken as an utterly mystical or other-world spirituality
- 4) Holistic education cannot be reduced to any technique.

#### 4. Support from other areas

When we deal with holistic approaches to education we should be aware that there are supporting developments in other areas as well. And it seems to me that we as educators have not yet carefully analysed how these other developments can support our search for a more holistic education.

*Quantum physics.* Holism in quantum physics is said to refute atomism, which has been predominant in modern philosophy of nature.

*Deep Ecology,* a paradigm that starts with the basic understanding that human beings and nature are not separated. The task is to explore the immanent values of all living beings.

Biology; *evolution theory;* definition of a living system as an autopoietic network.

*The movement towards a new ethics.* The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff demands that rationality should be opened up in two directions, to affectivity, attentiveness and to spiritual experiences that relates to the whole and to mystics so that “ethics should not degenerate to a cold war of regulations.”

*Feminist movement; eco-feminist theory,* exposing androcentric practices at the root of both social hierarchy and the destruction of nature.

*Teaching and learning theories:* Concepts that argue for the existence of several intellectual competencies, exploring of emotional intelligence, constructivism and its implication for learning are slowly influencing the thinking about teaching and learning.

Contemporary approaches to holistic education should become more aware of some of these findings and connect them with their view of education.

#### 5. A critical view of holistic education

Dealing with holistic education does not mean to do it in an uncritical way. We should use our competence to carefully analyse how holistic education can fit in a broader picture. One critique has to do with the concept of holistic as such: Wholeness itself cannot be contained by any system of thought, even by holism, no matter how elegantly we express it!

“Wholeness must be experienced as a living reality, as the Tao beyond words (*head path; harmony between opposites*). Only in

this way can we remain open to the complexity and paradox of the world as it essentially is.” (Miller 2000a, 116f).

The defence of personal subjectivity in different phases of holistic education “neglected the cultural and political dimensions of education and human development...An apolitical educational theory – a view of education that does not take into account the force of culture – is incomplete and ungrounded in the realities of the human condition.” (Miller 2000, 79).

It seems that one way to develop HE is to take account of a diversity of progressive traditions and discourses in education that are yearning “towards connectedness with others, the natural world, and the cosmos; yearnings we may refer to as spiritual: that aspect of human consciousness and will that yearns towards meaning, purpose, and connectedness.” (Oldenski & Carlson 2002, 1).

## **6. Different parts of a journey from *either-or* to *both-and***

*Either-or thinking* has given us a fragmented sense of reality that destroys the wholeness and wonder of life. Dealing with holistic education is a process of bringing things together, of promoting *interconnectedness*. When we do this in the area of Religious Education we refer to a subject in public schools in most countries in Europe where pupils are introduced to the religious dimension as part of the human being and into the religious tradition that exist in each of the specific countries.

In comparing aims for RE in different countries of Europe we find that there is a converging development towards common aims of RE. RE has to do with developing a sense for the spiritual and religious dimension of the human being, it has to do with

orientation in a situation of plurality many of us live in and it aims to support identity formation as well as mutual understanding:

Interconnected areas that are dealt with in RE can be named as follows: RE for the spirit / RE for the emotions /RE for the community / RE for the mind.

For Parker Palmer teaching and learning require a community ‘that can help renew and express ‘the capacity for connectedness at the heart of authentic education.’ (1998, 89). In his books he presents several models of *community in education* that give flesh to the image of teaching that is a guiding idea for Palmer: ‘to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.’ (90) And he further explains:

‘The community of truth is an image of knowing that embraces both the great web of being on which all things depend and the fact that our knowing of those things is helped, not hindered, by our being enmeshed in that web.’ (99)

## **7. Why holistic education? (A kind of summary)**

The Holistic Education Resourcebook (Schreiner et al. 2005) starts with an article that gives reasons and answers why we need holistic education. The arguments can be summarized as follows: Why holistic education?

- Because we need to engage the whole person
- Because we need to engage whole persons in community
- Because there are many ways of learning and knowing

- Because however specialised our knowledge may be we need to see it in a whole context
- Because wholeness is the essence of Christian faith
- Because the work of the ecumenical movement is for wholeness
- Because we need to learn to live together in wholeness

## 8. Why even attempt the impossible?

The American philosopher Ken Wilber has expressed his concern about an integral vision that can support a movement towards a holistic perspective:

"So why even attempt the impossible? Because, I believe, a little bit of wholeness is better than none at all, and an integral vision offers considerably more wholeness than the slice-and-dice alternatives. We can be more whole, or less whole; more fragmented, or less fragmented; more alienated, or less alienated – and an integral vision invites us to be a little more whole, a little less fragmented, in our work, our lives, our destiny." (Wilber 2001, xii).

## 9. Perspectives

Holistic education is a challenge for modern education: the yearning for wholeness can provide ground for a new or renewed praxis of knowing, of teaching and of learning. We should attempt the journey from an *either-or* to a *both and* perspective without neglecting existing differences.

More dialogue is needed between the different areas of education and holistic edu-

cation. There is a need to find collaborators in analysing the existing situation of broken paradoxes and to develop models of education guided by a more holistic approach. It can help us to become more curious and to appreciate the wonder of life and creation. The area of religious education seems to me an appropriate field for being included.

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## *The Last Word*

As we said in the Editorial, this is the final issue of EEF-NET. The Programme Plans are not yet far enough advanced for us to say whether a new ecumenical formation publication will be produced from 2007. However, you can be assured that WCC's work in ecumenical formation will continue to strengthen the ecumenical witness of the churches and the whole ecumenical movement.

The integration of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute and the former Education and Ecumenical Formation will reflect the priority given to ecumenical formation by the Assembly in Porto Alegre by giving a clearer focus. The new way of working described in the article on the Programme Plans 2007-2013, project teams which also involve staff from different programmes, will bring new perspectives and insights.

All WCC staff will be faced with changes in working style, and many with different responsibilities. The new programmes will officially commence in 2007 but the new staff configurations are already beginning to work in parallel with the old structure. As for the current Education and Ecumenical Formation staff, Nyambura Njorge and Tara Tautari, with their colleagues Gerald Arci, Sylvia Camacho, Begonia Rivera and Brigitte Schneider, will continue to have a major involvement in ecumenical formation. Simon Oxley will be joining the General Secretariat, working on staff and organisational development. A new programme executive will be appointed for ecumenical formation. Judith Kocher, who has been

responsible for the mailing list and the production of EEF-NET will be mainly working on the Decade to Overcome Violence. We thank her for her careful work which has ensured that the words we have commissioned or written have appeared in print and on the WCC website.

We thank you for travelling with us from Harare to Porto Alegre through the pages of EEF-NET. We have valued your comments on our work and, most of all, your prayerful encouragement.

The last word must be about ecumenical formation. It is about learning together as well as about one another. Ecumenical formation is about people and churches being ecumenical in attitude, ways of relating and in action. Let us seize new opportunities.

**A reminder of two significant publications from WCC's work  
on ecumenical formation:**

# **Creative Ecumenical Education**

**Learning from One Another**

**Simon Oxley**

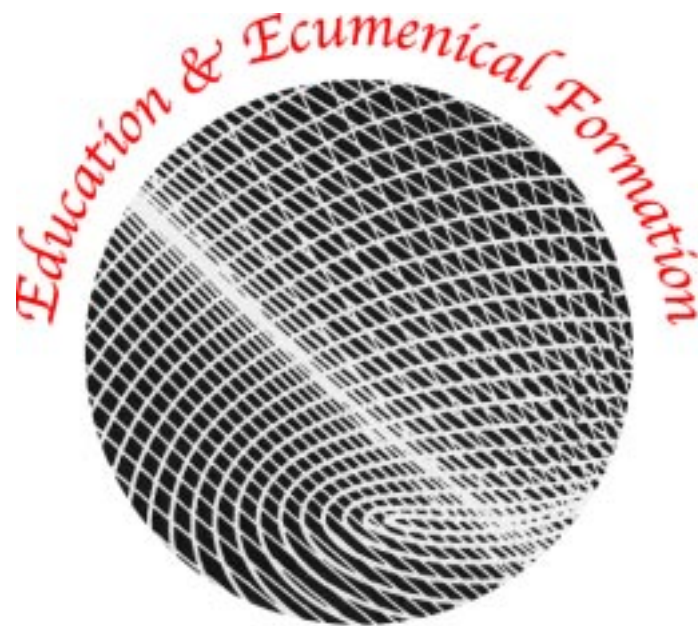
**WCC Publications 2002**

# **Holistic Education Resource Book**

**Learning and Teaching in an  
Ecumenical Context**

**edited by Peter Schreiner, Esther Banev and  
Simon Oxley**

**Waxmann 2005**



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