

## **INTRODUCTION**

For me, one of the most powerful learning experiences of the 10<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly, in Busan, Korea, was my participation in a Madang Workshop entitled “Alternative Theological Education for Life-Enhancing Culture” offered by The Oikos Theology Movement in Korea (Oikotree member) on Tuesday, 5 November 2013, in the Convention Hall, Room 208, from 14h15 to 15h45.

In this Madang Workshop, I heard to several presentations: a short video presentation about the Oikos Theology Movement, a presentation about “What is Oikos Theology Movement?”, two students spoke about “What does Oikos Theology Movement mean to them?”, three members of the Oikotree Roving Faculty presented “Their impressions about Oikos Theology Movement and its challenges for them”, and various responses invited about the “what would be the ecumenical implications of Oikos Theology Movement?” Then, a two main questions were addressed for discussion: 1) What sort of alternative theological education are going on in different parts of the world? and 2) How could the alternative theological education movement be shared with different part of the world?

## **THE OIKOS THEOLOGY MOVEMENT IN KOREA**

The Oikos Theology Movement in Korea (“Oikos Korea”) was organized in 2009, and has been initiated by a number of committed theologians (professors and pastors) teaching in various seminaries, colleges, universities, ecumenical institutions, and pastoral fields of work in Korea with the foci on life, justice, and peace. It seeks to contribute to the creation of a life promoting civilization that responds to God’s will in the face of the multi-fold crises of ecological crisis, economic crisis and spiritual crisis currently facing the entire earth community.

The “Oikos Korea” is a theological movement searching for alternative theological discourses with the following reasons:

- The human civilization today is unsustainable and therefore required to be replaced by a new paradigm of life-giving civilization;
- The traditional theological framework, developed on dualistic anthropocentric, patriarchal, and power-oriented epistemology, is unfit for this alternative life giving civilization;
- Hence, a new theological framework, which bases itself on relational and holistic thinking like Sangsaeng, Ubuntu, and “Buen Vivir” as exemplified in Asian, African and Latin American Indian thought, must be carved out to support the birth of life-giving civilization.

Currently, all members of “Oikos Korea” belong to the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK); it is expected, however, that other committed theologians from different Christian traditions will join and make the “Oikos Korea” more ecumenical.

The “Oikos Korea” holds annually summer and winter theological camps for theological students and pastors who are interested in the work of justice, peace, and life-giving ministry. They are expecting that this school could be developed into an international ecumenical summer school that can provide a platform for alternative theological thinking for a life-giving civilization and culture that is emerging out of the shadow of the “Empire”, greed, and industrialism.

The Oikos Summer School 2013, organized by the Oikos Theology Movement, was held from 19 to 22 August 2013 in Hanmaeum Eco-School in Jangseong, Korea under the theme, “God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace”. Since the first summer school in 2010, the Oikos Theology Movement has organized four summer schools and two winter school programs.

The Oikos Summer School 2013 was a model of the WCC Busan Assembly, following the Assembly program. The summer school was attended by ninety participants including 65 students from Daejeon Theological University, Busan Jangshin University, Youngnam Theological University and Seminary, Ewha Womans University, Seoul Jangshi University, Presbyterian Theological College and Seminary, Honam Theological University and 25 theological faculty members. The summer school also served as an orientation session for forty one KETI students, two GETI students and two stewards who participated in the WCC Assembly.

## **THE OIKOTREE MOVEMENT**

This movement is part of the Oikotree Movement, a global ecumenical covenanting movement open to people of all faiths seeking to identify and oppose economic injustice and ecological destruction. This network is organized and sponsored jointly by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM). It is open to individuals, local churches and faith communities, people's movements and all who share the concern for justice and the healing of the nations. Along with the Accra Confession, it is developed from the vision of a justice movement to transform ourselves and the world according to God's purposes and promises.

In August 2004, after seven years of hearings and debate, thousands of Christians from all over the world, meeting in Accra, Ghana adopted what has come to be known as the Accra Confession, a faith stance entitled Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth.

As identified in the Accra Confession covenanting for justice involves:

- Confessing our faith together;
- Coming together in relationships of mutual solidarity and accountability;
- Working together for justice in the economy and the earth in our own local contexts and globally ('to the ends of the earth' Acts 1:8).

This was developed further in the Kuala Lumpur statement<sup>1</sup> under the themes of:

- Reclaiming spirituality – rejecting anthropocentrism and reconnecting with nature, the incarnate reality of God's life-giving and life-renewing bounty;
- Reclaiming a theology of God's economy – promoting solidarity and justice because God's economic measures emphasize compassion, grace, love and justice;
- Reclaiming mission – recognizing that proclaiming God's good news of liberation and redemption in the context of the neo-liberal economy, ecological destruction and empire calls us to engage in transformative mission reclaiming life in its fullness for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Kuala Lumpur statement, Living Out the Accra Confession, May 2006.

In other follow-up work focusing on the issue of empire, the Manila Declaration<sup>2</sup> called on churches to ‘resist empire and to renew communities of life’.

Alongside this the ecumenical Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process, begun in 1998, also seeks to respond to the question “How do we live our faith in the context of globalization?” Now being pursued through the AGAPE study on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology, it is exploring alternatives to neo-liberal economic globalization, which link economy and ecology in ways that promote economic justice for all. This calls for a process of transformation that makes us all accountable to the victims of neo-liberal globalization.

The Kuala Lumpur statement, recognizing the need to take these concerns and initiatives forward concluded with an invitation to ‘all God’s people to join with us in a covenanting for justice movement to transform ourselves and the world according to God’s purposes and promises, inspired by the vision of a new heaven and a new earth’.

Oikotree is the fruit of this vision, an ecumenical space in which a movement of those seeking to live faithfully in the midst of economic injustice and ecological destruction can take shape.

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

Taking its name after Revelations 22:1-2 it seeks to network, challenge, encourage and offer support to all who wish to covenant together for justice in the economy and the earth. As such its principal precepts (core values) are:

1. Living faithfully through engaging in the struggle for justice in the economy and the earth.
2. A Spirituality of resistance and transformation.
3. The formation of life-sustaining, justice-affirming communities, which embrace creation and humanity.

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<sup>2</sup> Manila Declaration, An Ecumenical Faith Stance Against Global Empire For A Liberated Earth Community, July 2006.

4. Advocacy of economic and ecological justice, and support for alternatives to an ecologically destructive economy.
5. Resistance to neo-liberal corporate globalization, patriarchy and empire.
6. Accompaniment with people and communities struggling to overcome economic and ecological injustice.
7. Solidarity in the struggle to change the systems that are destroying humanity and the earth.
8. Inclusivity, diversity, openness and transparency.

And its main purposes and goals are:

#### A. Process

9. To invite participation in a covenanting for justice movement (Oikotree) by churches, ecumenical organizations, local congregations and individuals engaged in the struggle for justice in the economy and the earth.
10. To share resources for nurturing, developing and sustaining the commitment to justice and its lived expressions.
11. To support individual and communal actions which live out alternatives promoting justice in the economy and the earth.
12. To explore and promote alternative economic and ecological models to neo-liberal economic globalization, the consumerist materialism it spawns and the patriarchy it supports.
13. To strengthen mutual support through networking.
14. To further develop the theological and missiological implications of the Accra Confession and the AGAPE call in a pluralistic and multi-faith world.

#### B. Approaches

15. Compassionate engagement with the lived experience of others and the issues raised by that experience.

16. A spirit of learning and commitment to personal and communal formation and transformation.
17. A life-engaging kairotic<sup>3</sup> reading of the Bible rooted in the everyday lives of people, open to the insights of other faith communities.
18. Cultivation of life-affirming spiritualities, sharing rituals, prayers, images, symbols, actions, songs, music etc.
19. Inviting people to see diverse perspectives and other ways of living, offering examples and alternative models.
20. Joining in actions of resistance against systemic injustice, patriarchy and empire.

## **HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT: THE AGAPE PROCESS, BACKGROUND, MANDATE AND CONTEXT**

The starting point was the question first raised at the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Harare in 1998: How do we live our faith in the context of economic globalization?

Building on the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process, which was set in motion in Harare climaxing with the AGAPE Call presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006, the ecumenical study and deliberation on the impacts of and responses to economic globalization were further deepened through the implementation of the Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE) project from 2007 till 2012.

Understanding that poverty, wealth and ecology are integrally related, the PWE project addresses the need for economic transformation in the areas mentioned in the AGAPE Call:

- Poverty eradication;
- Trade;
- Finance;
- Sustainable use of land and natural resources;

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<sup>3</sup> Reading the signs of the times.

- Public goods and services;
- Life-giving agriculture;
- Decent jobs and people's livelihoods; and
- The power of empire<sup>4</sup>

The PWE project approved a continuation of the AGAPE process in collaboration with other ecumenical partners and organizations with proposals to engage in:

- Solid political, economic and social analysis;
- The work of theological reflection on these issues that arise out of the center of our faith;
- Ongoing dialogue between religious, economic and political actors; and
- Sharing practical, positive approaches from the churches.

Furthermore, recognizing that the interwoven crises confronting our world today are, at core, ethical, moral and spiritual, the PWE project offered spaces for churches to reflect jointly and critically on the theological implications of and responses to rampant poverty, widening wealth disparities and ecological degradation through regional and global church consultations as well as various seminars and study processes. Some of the questions that were tackled include:

- What are the ethical, moral and spiritual implications of the current intertwined financial, economic and ecological crises?
- What does faith have to say about greed?
- In thinking about an “economy of enough” that is respectful of ecology what lessons can be drawn from other faiths and the radical spirituality and contentment of many indigenous and rural communities?

The Oikotree Movement is one of these spaces of critical and theological reflection.

## **FINAL REFLECTIONS: NEED FOR OPEN DIALOGUE AND CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION AMONG CHURCHES**

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<sup>4</sup> For the complete document of the AGAPE Call see: [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org).

The AGAPE process from 1998 to 2006 challenged churches around the world to interrogate the phenomenon of economic globalization and its impact on people and on the Earth. Since then, the 2006 AGAPE Call and background document have been translated into at least 13 languages, discussed by churches and taught in some theological seminaries.

The AGAPE process, however, exposed continuing North-South divergences in analyses and recommendations among churches and ecumenical partners, stemming largely from contrasting worldviews and experiences with economic globalization which presents multifaceted, complex realities.

The process also enabled the realization that churches are themselves complicit in dominant economic structures as producers, consumers and investors. The Accra Confession (WCRC, formerly WARC, 2004) states: “We acknowledge the complicity and guilt of those who consciously or unconsciously benefit from the current neoliberal economic global system; we recognize that this includes...churches...”

These challenges underscored the need for genuinely open and connected dialogue as well as critical self-reflection as churches on the phenomenon of economic globalization to strengthen understanding and synergies among churches and the ecumenical community so as to fulfill the threefold vision of the WCC of living out Christian unity more fully, being “neighbors to all” and taking great care of creation.

## **IN MY CONTEXT: FUTURE PROJECTS**

Even though we live in different contexts with their own specificities, there are common challenges that we need to face on. These challenges were partly exposed through the AGAPE process. But, we are also exposed to them in our everyday life. For this reason, as young theologians and pastors, we need to help and support all those initiatives that try to implement better conditions of life for every human being and all Creation. We must work together to find news epistemologies in our relation to Creation, reflect on and redefine old theological concepts to respond in a better manner to the challenges of our time.

So, after this experience, I think it would be very important and helpful to develop this vision in the Cuban context in three different ways:

- 1) To organize an Oikos summer school the first week of July 2015 at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas with pastors and theological students interested on this subject;
- 2) To suggest the Student Christian Movement directive (MEC) to celebrate their 2015 Assembly focused on this theme;
- 3) To use the Presbyterian-Reformed Church national publications: Heraldo Cristiano, Juprecu and Su Voz, to inform the congregations about the Oikotree Movement, its purposes and different activities.