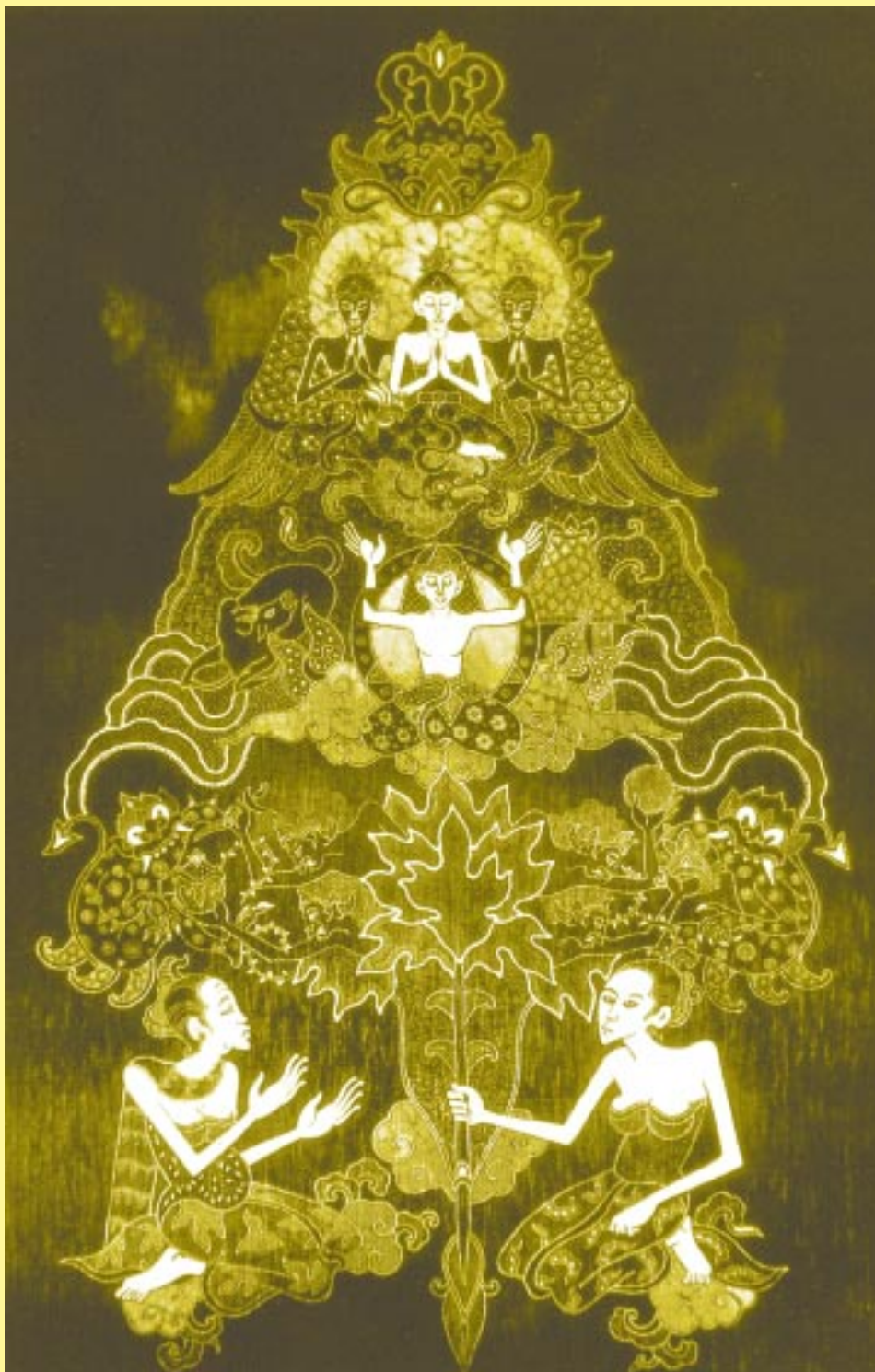




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CCA NEWS





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'God Exalted' by Hendrato (Indonesia) (from 'The Bible through Asian Eyes', courtesy of the Asian Christian Art Association)

cca news

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EDITORIAL

In this issue of *CCA News*, three major reports are included. One is on the ecumenical meeting on China relations organised by the CCA and the World Council of Churches in Hong Kong. Another is on the CCA-FABC joint staff meeting held in the CCA Centre. The third is on the Third Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS III) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. These three events reflect our commitment towards broadening our ecumenical endeavours here in Asia.

The meeting on China relations was a step towards improving ecumenical relations with the China Christian Council. The joint staff meeting with the Roman Catholic Church through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences was a time for mutual understanding and sharing to find ways of doing things together. And CATS III was a time for expanding our concern for theologising in the midst of the plural realities of Asia. This commitment will continue to find expression as we find ways of building up ecumenical relations and cooperation. CATS III brought together over 120 Asian theologians. It was a unique occasion for theological reflections on the theme, 'Visioning New Life Together among Asian Religions'. It was a rich experience for all those who were there in the congress. Apart from major inputs given by eminent speakers from different religious perspectives, there were opportunities for practical theological articulation on Asian contextual theologies. We were reminded for example of the many voices raised in the areas of Minjung theology, Dalit theology, tribal theology, Asian women's theology and a new way of doing theology, etc.

In Asia, we continue to face challenges brought about by forces of globalisation, injustice, poverty, human rights violations, and even by natural calamities (most of which are also linked to our poor stewardship of God's creation). In the midst of these realities we sense the anger raging across Asia over Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit on 13 August to the Yasukuni Shrine for the war dead. Koizumi has come under fire at home and abroad. Moreover, a controversial new junior high school history textbook written by revisionist scholars also drew strong protest within Japan and from other Asian countries who want the Japanese government to take responsibility for its war atrocities.

We continue to hear of hostage taking in the Philippines. In Bangladesh and Indonesia, churches are often at the receiving end of political games and religious fundamentalism. In Sri Lanka, the international airport was recently attacked—a clear sign that the civil war is far from over. There is the instability of peace and security in northeast Asia. And to add to the ongoing violations of religious freedom and human rights there is the ongoing spread of HIV/AIDS.

As Christians, we have to ask ourselves—

- Do we have a capacity to tackle all these problems?
- Do we have the ability to care for all those who are victimised?
- Do we have the integrity to give them new visions and hopes?
- Do we have the sincerity to work together with other faith communities and civil society groups in order to attain 'Fullness of Life for All'?

It is now time for us to be more deeply involved in carrying out our ecumenical tasks at this juncture of history for the betterment of people's lives in Asia today.

Ahn Jae Woong





Doing Things Together

CCA and FABC find ways to cooperate and collaborate

The Christian Conference of Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) held a joint staff meeting at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong on 1–2 August 2001. The FABC staff present were Edward Malone, Thomas Michel, Edmund Chia, Virginia Saldanha, Josef Eilers, Anthony Rogers and Vicente Cajilig. The CCA staff present were Ahn Jae Woong, Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, Prawate Khid-arn, Tony Waworuntu, Daniel Thiagarajah, Josef Widyatmadja, Corazon Tabing-Reyes, Hope Antone, Richard Kaing and Wati Longchar.

The meeting had the following objectives:

- for the staff to get acquainted with each other,
- to familiarise staff with each other's organisational structures and programs,
- to review the existing CCA–FABC cooperation and joint programs,
- to explore further possible areas of cooperation and new ways of doing things together.

The meeting included worship, Bible study and community building. After sharing on the functions, structure and pro-

grams of each body, the joint staff identified FABC offices and CCA program areas that have areas of possible collaboration (see the table in column one below).

There have been noteworthy efforts of cooperation between CCA and FABC on various programs. From the CCA viewpoint, there are two means of collaboration:

- when CCA prepares programs and invites FABC to participate (send a representative) and vice versa,
- when both CCA and FABC plan the program together and share the cost equally.

It is felt that both ways are good and can be continued.

CCA and FABC: Ways of Collaboration

Share and Meet Together

There should be a continuing joint sharing and meeting of staff of CCA and FABC, for exchange of concerns, program approaches and program focuses. From the meeting it became clear that both CCA and FABC are concerned about the areas of inter-faith dialogue, gender justice, values education (in the midst of globalisation), articulation of Asian theologising, peace and justice, ecology issues and spirituality. It was felt that the next joint staff meeting should begin with a spiritual retreat—that spirituality should be at the core of the witness and the joint collaboration of CCA and FABC.

Exchange Publications

In order to facilitate knowing more about the work and the staff of CCA and FABC, it is important to have an exchange of publications, books, reports etc. A request was made for enough copies for all the staff on each side.

Share Programs

It was felt that CCA and FABC should continue the ongoing practice of mutual invitation to programs and meetings, but they should also work towards more fifty-fifty sharing through joint programs. (In fact, programs such as AMCU

FABC Offices and CCA Program Areas Correlations

FABC	CCA
Office of Human Development	Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service
Office of Social Communication	General Secretariat
Office of Laity	Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment
Office of Theological Concerns	Faith, Mission and Unity
Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy	Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment
Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs	Faith, Mission and Unity
Office of Evangelisation	Faith, Mission and Unity





CCA IN FOCUS

I, II and III and the Joint Ecumenical Formation were done on this basis.) It was emphasised that the collaboration does not just happen at the program but also before as well as after the program. This includes mutual consultation on the theme or focuses of the program, the preparation of the appropriate representative and the follow-up work that must be done. It was also mentioned that program secretaries of CCA and office secretaries of FABC can also have exchange visits or exposure in each other's programs to experience how things are done.

Advocacy

There is an interest in doing more advocacy work, especially at the grassroots level, aside from the ongoing programs and workshops. Levels through which this can be done include the local churches/denominations or church units, the schools that are related to the churches and the network of institutions.

Spiritual Formation

There is a concern for more proactive spiritual formation, not only for adults but beginning with young children. Logically, it is too late to wait for people to be too old and with fixed minds in order for formation or faith-shaping to take place.

Share Approaches

There is an interest in having/using shared approaches to doing programs. For example, in catechesis (FABC) or Christian education (CE)—perhaps some manuals or modules, especially for the formation (e.g. values education) of young children can be produced jointly and promoted in church-related schools on both sides.

Mainstream Interreligious and Feminist Perspectives

There is an interest in intentionally mainstreaming interreligious and feminist perspectives in programs and publications. This includes ensuring a good representation of women participants (not simply a token number) in programs or meetings and the plural and feminist voices in the publications.

Communications

Although CCA has no separate desk on communication, an offer was made by FABC-OSC for CCA news to be shared

through the Radio Veritas Asia. CCA is still welcome to participate in the communications-related activities of FABC. Likewise, any programs of CCA program areas that relate to communications will also be open to the participation of FABC-OSC.

Email

The importance of knowing more about each office or program area and the corresponding staff was emphasised. It was suggested that there be a group email for both FABC and CCA.

AMAN

In 2002 CCA and FABC will join the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) consultation in Asia (on women, children and minorities). It was agreed that Edmund Chia and Prawate Khid-arn and Tony Waworuntu meet with Abdul Sabur in Thailand.

Levels of Cooperation Needed

- Development of think tanks or task groups on issues both CCA and FABC can come up with a position or a unified voice. Possible issues are globalisation, cybertechnology, religious fundamentalism etc.
- Policy—what is our common stand/position on such issues? How do we communicate that to our constituencies so that they will be inspired to take up the issues?
- Priorities—what can we do together for purposes of streamlining and avoiding overlap? What are the immediate needs of our constituencies?
- Strategies—how do we inspire and equip the people at the grassroots to take up the issues and deal with them? How do we support and sustain their work and struggle?

Fundamentalism

The issue of religious fundamentalism was picked up as a priority issue at the meeting. The group decided to make use of the Social Advocacy Group (consisting of CCA, FABC, WSCF A-P and YMCA). FABC and CCA representatives to this group must make sure that the delegates from both groups are those with some knowledge and expertise on religious fundamentalism. Their role will be to analyse trends and issues and then to suggest to the bodies concerned what to do together.

Hope S. Antone





Third Congress of Asian Theologians

Visioning New Life Together among Asian Religions

Visioning New Life Together among Asian Religions'—this was the theme of the Third Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS III), which gathered about 120 Asian theologians and church workers from Asian countries and abroad in the Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on 5–11 August 2001.

The theme itself was a challenging one. Human dignity, freedom, participation and fullness of life are today denied to the vast majority of our people. The process of globalisation and the market economy is marginalising more and more people, especially those who belong to the lower strata of society. The rise of fundamentalistic trends among all religions is causing serious conflicts between believers of

various religions. The emergence of religious and cultural nationalism in some Asian countries is undermining the pluralistic and democratic foundations of Asian societies. At this critical juncture of Asian history, all people in Asia, who belong to different traditions, religious and secular, have to join hands and walk together to envision new life for all the people of Asia and for the whole world.

The gathering was truly ecumenical, with scholars and theologians from different denominations and religious backgrounds. Among the presenters were Dr Wesley Ariarajah, former Deputy General Secretary of the WCC, who gave the keynote address; Thomas Michel, a Jesuit priest who specialises in Islam; Dr Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, a Muslim scholar; Prof. Sulak

Sivaraksa, a Buddhist scholar and activist from Thailand; and Dr Chung Hyun Kyung, an ecofeminist theologian. Dr Swami Agnivesh, a Hindu scholar, was unable to attend but sent his paper to be shared.

In his opening address, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, CCA General Secretary, challenged the gathering to draw on their collective wisdom and vision in order to develop a new ecumenical thinking, a 'neoecumenism' that is grounded in the realities of life. He challenged the participants to help articulate this neoecumenism, where the Roman Catholic Church, evangelical churches and people of other faiths would work together in 'Visioning New Life Together among Asians' and for the 'Fullness of Life for All'.

In his keynote address, Wesley Ariarajah raised three issues relating to doing theology in Asia. The first issue he described as the gap between theological articulation and the language of the pulpit. One of the disturbing features of Asian theology until now is that it has little or no impact on the theology of the pulpit and the pew. He reminded the participants that theology is the servant of the church and it is done



Dr Wesley Ariarajah, Dr Wong Wai Ching, Dr Felix Wilfred and Dr Kim Yong Bock at CATS III





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for and on behalf of the people in the pews. The only theology that would make a difference to the future of the churches in Asia is that which has the people in mind.

The second issue relates to the problem of the public practice of theology as opposed to the prevailing understanding of Christianity from the missionary movement. The primary reason why the missionary movement failed in Asia was the theology of religions and the missiology that went with it. Ariarajah suggested that we should learn two levels of speaking about God. While our theological language holds enormous significance and meaning to our faith community, when dealing with the whole human community and about God's relationship to humankind, we need to communicate on a different plane and with a different language.

Dr Ariarajah discussed the need for an interfaith visioning for life. God's purpose, as we often claim rightly, is not to save the church but the world. The church is a participant in and witness to the mission of God. The Church's mission is thus a part of God's mission in the world. We need to develop with others a 'wider spiritual fellowship' so that God would be able to use us in God's wider mission.

In his presentation, Prof. Sulak Sivarksa said that modern capitalism and consumerism is an anathema to the goals of Buddhism. Capitalism gives value to the accumulation of material goods and monetary profit, which in turn promotes greed and individualism at the expense of sharing and community. Buddhism also recognises that all things are interdependent, that they do not exist in and of



Participants at CATS III

themselves. Therefore, in south and southeast Asia, Buddhists have long been concerned with both the attainment of personal liberation and the maintenance of proper social order. Hence, personal liberation and social justice are both integral parts of a Buddhist society. He expressed the hope that Buddhism and other religions can play an important role in transforming the culture of consumerism, and its associated greed and violence, into a culture of compassion and peace.

In his exploration of common horizons with the Hindu tradition, Dr Francis D'sa suggested that we need to appreciate the truth that is housed and nurtured in the diverse religions of Asia. He said Christians can draw energy from the cosmic community where everyone and everything is intertwined in an interrelated function and where a world vision can be discovered. In response to D'sa's paper, Dr Sathianathan Clarke warned that in spite of the magnificent and utopian Hindu world vision of the early Hindu seers, Hinduism as experienced and expressed by different sections of the

Hindu community is far from utopian. In accordance with the myth that all reality originates from the one source alone, the Hindu society was hierarchically divided into different social strata. The Dalits, however, who form 15 per cent of Indian society, were not accounted for in the emanation of all beings. Hence, the social marginalisation, economic slavery and religious exclusion of the Dalits were legitimised by the same foundational myths that promised liberation to the individual and the world.

In a concluding statement, the participants of CATS III called for a new theology of religions and a new pedagogy of encounter. The Congress also elected the following as members of the Continuing Committee: Dr Wong Wai Ching, Hong Kong (CCA), and Dr Kuncheria Pathil, India (FABC) as co-moderators; Dr Daniel S. Thiagarajah, Sri Lanka (CCA), secretary; Maria Sophia Lizares Bodegon, Philippines, treasurer; and Dr Kang Nam Soon, Korea (PTCA), Dr Samson Prabhakar, India (SATHRI), Rev. Geoffrey Lilburne, Australia (at large), and the new director of ATESEA.





Visioning New Life Together among Asian Religions

Statement of the Third Congress of Asian Theologians, 6–11 August, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

1. The Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS), born in 1997 in Suwon, Korea, is an ecumenical venture of Asian theologians to tread new paths of theologising in Asia by struggling with the Asian realities and problems. CATS I set the agenda by its theme, 'Asian Theology in a Changing Asia: Asian Theological Agenda towards the Twenty-first Century'. On the eve of the Great Jubilee, CATS II in Bangalore, India, in 1999, focused on the theme, 'Celebrating Life Together', underlining the Church's mission of love and service to all, especially in our age of globalisation where fullness of life is more and more denied to the vast majority of the people of Asia.
2. Here in Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the Third Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS III) assembled about 120 participants from among most of the Asian countries and from other parts of the world during 5–11 August 2001 to discuss the ways and means of 'Visioning New Life Together among Asian Religions'. Human dignity, freedom, participation and fullness of life are today denied to the vast majority of our people. The process of globalisation and the market economy is marginalising more and more people, especially those who belong to the lower strata of society. The rise of fundamentalistic trends among all religions has caused serious conflicts between believers of various religions. The emergence of religious and cultural nationalism in some Asian countries undermines the pluralistic and democratic foundations of Asian societies. At this critical juncture of Asian history, all peoples of Asia who belong to different traditions, religious and secular, have to join hands and walk together to envision a new life for all the people of Asia and for the whole world. The Third Congress of Asian Theologians was called for a common search and exploration to discover the liberative potential of the various religious traditions of Asia and to gather these vital spiritual resources for creating new Asian societies and envisioning new life for all the people of Asia.
3. The Christian approach to the people of other faiths in Asia, in retrospect, is a live issue with all its inherent problems, ambiguities and conflicts. In the early history of the church in Asia and its extension of mission to different parts of Asia, the St Thomas tradition in south and northwest India, and the Nestorian mission in China are significant. Many Christian communities in Asia developed a harmonious and peaceful relationship with the communities of other faiths. In the course of this development many local and cultural elements both good and bad were assimilated and incorporated.
4. The political and colonial impact from the West in the modern period came with the Christian community's association with foreign powers, even though attempts were made for indigenisation, enculturation and dialogue. The modern missionary era in Asia, in spite of certain success among the deprived classes for regaining their dignity, was to a great extent a dismal phase with hostile, aggressive, and even arrogant attitude to the other faiths. The local cultures and religious traditions of Asia were often looked upon as inferior, to be replaced by Christianity and Western cultural traditions. The missionary praxis, in general, was one of converting and baptising people of other religions and extending the churches at the cost of the social, cultural and religious values that constituted their inherent sense of dignity and identity. We do not however question the good intentions and the





commitment of the missionaries to the Gospel and the tremendous hardships and heroism they had undertaken. We know that the missionaries were the products of their time. The existential realities of the world and our theological thinking have been radically changed today. We are now witnessing a shift in the traditional paradigm of Christian relationship and mission to the people of other faiths.

5. This congress aimed at consolidating and advancing the new paradigm of Christian life among the rich variety of religious traditions of Asia. We acknowledge that Christian mission in Asia has been, to a great extent, a failure if measured by its own aims. This failure emerged from its unhelpful theology of religions and its missiology. Our Christian insight that God lives and works in solidarity with the poor must be shared in Asia. However, the experience of God does not need to be imported, for it is already here. God lives and works in the great religions of Asia and also in the folk religions, which often pose a direct challenge to institutional Christianity. Christians now must humbly acknowledge that in these many ways God has always been savingly present in the continent. In its failure to acknowledge these facts, Christian mission in Asia was arrogant and colonialist. It denied the possibility of pluralism.
6. The emerging mission of Christians is to work with peoples of other faiths to fashion new understandings of community. People need to belong to a religious community at two levels: first, to the specific religion they profess; and second, to a wider community that is both religious and secular and that welcomes many faiths and ideologies to enter into dialogue and relationship at the grassroots level. There is as yet no concept of a religious community of place, and as theologians we would wish to develop this understanding in the face of the forced uniformity and exclusion brought by globalisation. There is an urgent need for the wider community to uphold diversity, to cry

out for justice for all and to practise new forms of inclusion. As Christian theologians we wish to be engaged in such community building, for we know that such a work can really make a difference in our own lives and in the lives of the people of Asia. In our journey together with the people of Asian religions, we recognise the increasing phenomenon of violence in Asia and worldwide, and we commit ourselves to work together to overcome various forms of violence and to promote a culture of peace and justice. We reiterate that affirmation of life is the primary purpose of all religious vocation.

7. In this congress, we tried to listen humbly to the living religious traditions of Asia and to discover their spiritual resources and liberative potential for new life in Asia. The accumulated wisdom of various religious traditions reminds us that we should not get trapped in the perversions of the present context. Prophetic traditions of all Asian religions provide a nuance to counter all attempts by hierarchical structures to preserve 'present' as eternal. This is manifested in the uncompromising approach of prophetic vision to all forms of oppressions, marginalisations and the forces that threaten life. Moreover these prophetic traditions lifted the concept of freedom to the 'beyond' as an ontological principle that history ever strives for. We have not yet discovered fully the liberative potential of the Christian Gospel. The uniqueness of Christianity is the uniqueness of Jesus' love, compassion and commitment to the poor and the marginalised and his preferential option for them.
8. Creation narratives allude to the notions that the realisation of the face of God in the 'other' is the essence of religious vocation. Islam reiterates this concept by encouraging everyone to go beyond a legalistic approach to human relationship by demanding strict justice to a God-centred spirituality in which people are invited and urged to treat the 'other' as God treats us.





9. Without our conventional language of divine, the Buddhist principle of friendship correlates with a religious notion that critical solidarity with victims to overcome ignorance, including, among others, poverty, hegemonical power structures, exploitative economic organisation, oppressive gender relations, discriminative social and cultural formations, is the principle of the divine. Such solidarity transcends all that have divided people in history. The principle of *ahimsa* calls for respect for and promotion of all forms of life, and thus to safeguard the integrity of all creation.
10. Solidarity within Hinduism aims at integration of the human with equality within the context of the cosmic community where everyone and everything is intertwined in an interrelated function. This cosmic community (*rta*) is the liberating principle of people and nature. Reconciliation of the creator and the creation is the essence of *rta*.
11. At the same time we are aware of the patriarchal practices of the traditional religions. The combination of patriarchy and capitalism today intensifies the exploitation and destruction of nature, women and all the weak and vulnerable as 'the other'. The revival of the original 'life vision' of indigenous/folk religions, accompanied by the resurrection of our dying mother earth will lead us to live together with all differences. It implies that the promotion of abundant life is the essence of the ultimate divinity of every religion including the wisdom of traditions of folk and tribal religions.
12. While affirming the spiritual resources and the liberative potential of Asian religions, we also acknowledge that the institutionalised forms of all religions had certain built-in oppressive structures, and at times, instead of nourishing the fullness of life of individuals and communities, they became instruments of dehumanisation, oppression and even destruction of life. Authoritarianism, male-
domination and lack of proper democratic processes in many Christian churches, participation of Buddhist monks in the ongoing ethnic wars in Sri Lanka, the failure of many Islamic countries to respect religious pluralism, the role of Hinduism in providing a cultural and theological legitimisation to the caste system and in denying the Dalits their rights to be human are some of the issues that need introspection and self-criticism on the part of Asia's religions.
13. Along with a new theology of religions we call for a new pedagogy of encounter. It is the question of actual human interrelatedness, not abstract ideas, and dogmas, which constitute the loci of encounter. This encounter calls for commitment to our continued struggles to overcome the forces that threaten the fullness of life. Exploring ways and means to ensure an enriched, lived experience of harmony, justice and wellbeing with our neighbours is imperative. There is an urgent need to develop a different language of dialogue and to cultivate a culture of dialogue and new ways of learning about living religions in community. We reaffirm that life is to be lived at the local level where people of various religious convictions encounter in their day-to-day life and negotiate with the existential realities. Thus we underline the importance of involvement of local communities in the process of envisioning new life among people of various religions in Asia.
14. We thank God for this grace of having brought us together here in Yogyakarta for the third congress of Asian theologians and for this very fruitful exchange among us. We have only begun our search in the conflicting and ambiguous existential realities of Asia, while holding fast to our precious heritage of the Gospel. We renew our common commitment to struggle with all the peoples of Asia, believers of all religions as well as nonbelievers, in search of new life and abundance of life for all peoples of Asia and for the whole world.





Building Ecumenical Relations with China

CCA and WCC hold ecumenical meeting

The Christian Conference of Asia held an ecumenical meeting on 14–15 June in Hong Kong, bringing together a group of people with expertise in and concern for China as well as commitment to building and strengthening ecumenical relations with churches in China. The meeting was supported by the World Council of Churches through Clement John, WCC Executive Secretary for International Relations.

The Church in China

Philip Wickeri, former coordinator of the Amity Foundation and now a professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary in California, reminded the group of the significant contributions of the churches in China, e.g. the concept of postdenominationalism church, the vision of a strong and independent Chinese church and the missionary concept of sending friends, rather than missionaries, to China.

He also cited some concerns such as the seeming lack of attention to ecclesiology in postdenominational China. He suggested that the Faith and Order Commission in the WCC initiate discussions about the situation of church unity in China, both learning from and contributing to a better understanding of ecclesiology. The China Christian Council (CCC) is also concerned with the increasing number of

Western, Korean and overseas Chinese missionaries working in China, some of whom still support the smuggling of Bibles into China. There are pastoral concerns within China and among the Chinese overseas as well as a growing number of informal English, Korean and Taiwanese congregations within China catering to the needs of their respective migrant communities.

Human Rights

The issue of human rights in China continues to be raised by the international community and NGOs at various international forums. What is the most effective way in having a dialogue with the CCC on sensitive issues like human rights? How do we work ecumenically in dealing with human rights in China in relation with CCC? What methods and processes would be different from

the approaches of the international human rights organisations?

Rev. Bao Jia Yuan, Deputy General Secretary of the China Christian Council, shared that there were some stories that stirred up a lot of sensation and made big headlines overseas but which the people in China did not know about. When investigations are made to clarify the whole issue, they often turn out to be quite different from the international versions. He expressed that clarification of facts is very important. Each case has its background and sometimes it may not be violations but misunderstanding. CCC also needs to help the local government to understand the interpretation of the policy on religious freedom as China is still in a transition of rule by man to rule of law. CCC works to help settle issues of religious freedom on a



Philip Wickeri, Ahn Jae Woong and Clement John at the Ecumenical Meeting on China Relations





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case by case basis. Rev. Bao hopes that the ecumenical partners will view China in a positive way. The situation is improving all the time and there is a need to help others understand the real situation in China. As a matter of fact, the Chinese government has brought a CCC delegation to their meetings to help them respond to international attacks. The CCC therefore asks for understanding of ecumenical partners that the church in China knows the best way to respond to issues within China that may not be the same expectation of people overseas. With regards to the Falun Gong issue, CCC does not want to judge them outside China, but within China the concern is on the bad witness the group has caused.

Cross-straits Relations

It was noted that there have been many initiatives in cross-straits relations—informal initiatives done by individuals as well as some denominational initiatives. Although helpful in some ways, these have not been most fruitful in promoting relations across the straits. CCA suggested appointing some ‘ambassadors’ to facilitate the process but noted that it could be easier for the WCC because both the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan and the China Christian Council are members of the world council.

It was recalled that a way to accommodate both the PCT and CCC in the WCC was through the listing of members as churches rather than under the national category. This, however, did not solve the problem, as sensitive political issues were never touched. Another way has been holding CCA and WCC meetings, where both Taiwan and

CCC could participate, without having political issues debated. Instead there is a need to look for common ground to work together—one that is beyond political and nationalistic boundaries. Such meetings of the PCT and CCC have been cordial because political issues were not touched and discussed. It is difficult to ask the one to accept the political position of the other. CCC would like to participate more in ecumenical activities provided there is a constructive atmosphere for their participation.

Rev. Bao Jia Yuan pointed out that to avoid suspicion on the hidden motives of CCA and WCC, those who handle or organise such meetings would have to have very clear policies or principles. If the objective of the meeting is very vague, then it is very hard for CCC to respond to the invitation.

Three levels of co-operation were therefore proposed:

- meetings of the churches without talking about politics,
 - CCC participation in ecumenical work, including defining what meetings can be helpful for them,
 - dialogue on political differences.
- Since the first two are short-term strategies, there is a need to look for a suitable forum to deal with political differences, which are at the core of the problem. Only by solving this can there be a long-term solution.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were gathered from this sharing:

- the importance or priority of maintaining the ecumenical fellowship, including cross-straits relations,
- that the CCC and PCT and the various positions they raise will con-

tinue to put pressure on the ecumenical movement,

- the importance of hearing different voices from Taiwan, including other churches there,
- the problematic participation of CCC and PCT in ecumenical meetings if there are no clear guidelines of participation,
- the need to hear the CCC voice in the ecumenical movement,
- that this kind of conversation/dialogue must continue and with the participation of the different churches in Taiwan.

CCA is willing to help in this area. Future meetings could also take up mission, pastoral and ecclesial issues.

Chan Beng Seng/DAGA

Present at the meeting were Wong Wai Ching, member of the CCA presidium; Ahn Jae Woong, CCA General Secretary; Tony Waworuntu, Joint Executive Secretary of CCA-JID; Clement John, WCC Executive Secretary of International Relations; Park Kyung Seo, Ambassador for Human Rights, Korea; Eric So, General Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council; Philip Wickeri, Professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary; Kenichi Otsu, General Secretary of the National Christian Council in Japan; Bao Jia Yuan, Deputy General Secretary of the China Christian Council; Ewing Carroll, Overseas Coordinator of the Amity Foundation; and Chan Beng Seng, Executive Director of the Documentation for Action Groups in Asia.





Tackling the AIDS Pandemic in China

Visit to Yunnan Province on HIV/AIDS concerns

In conjunction with the Amity Foundation, the Christian Conference of Asia sponsored a visit on HIV/AIDS concerns for a delegation of eight from Thailand, Hong Kong and Norway. The program was arranged in two counties of Yunnan Province in mainland China.

Since there is still no medicine that can cure the HIV virus at this time, the only way to cope with it is through changes in social attitudes and human behaviour. It is a time for social institutions—family, religious and educational—to take action before it's too late. The delegation called for closer collaboration between Thailand and China to tackle the HIV/AIDS problem in both countries.

'Presently, there are about one million HIV/AIDS cases in China. Of these cases, 70 per cent are in Yunnan. And if there are no proper prevention strat-

egies, the HIV/AIDS epidemic could reach ten million by the year 2010,' Dr Wang Yun Sheng, Director of the Yunnan Provincial Public Health Bureau, told the group.

Industries and tourism are top priorities for economic development in most counties and townships in China. With its beautiful natural scenery, Chingjiang County of Yunnan has been developing rapidly. These developments attract young men and women. It is estimated that about one million tourists, mainly locals, visit Chengjiang annually.

With rapid growth in industrial and tourism development in Yunnan, the Thai delegates shared the negative impacts of tourism policies and programs that have increased the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Thailand. 'Sex tourism' always operates illegally under the promotion of tourism. 'We don't want

China to follow this bitter experience that Thailand faced in the past.' Thus said Mr Jiao Qias Shun of Feng Qing County, who shared that presently there are three main routes of HIV/AIDS infection in Feng Qing County and in Yunnan—blood transmission, sexual relations and from mother to infant.

The delegation visited Mr Yang, a HIV positive person who contracted the HIV virus a year ago. There is no sign that he is HIV positive. His elder sister expressed concern for him, saying, 'I feel pity, sorrow and sometimes anger. But I know my younger brother is a good guy. What happened to him is by accident. I will try my best to give him moral and psychological support so that his case can become a valuable lesson to others.'

The HIV/AIDS situation in China (and Thailand) is rapidly moving towards a critical stage. 'We want to learn from your successful experiences in Thailand,' Dr Wang said. The visit was meaningful as all parties moved towards new and closer cooperation on this issue in the coming years.

As a follow-up to the program, in cooperation with the Amity Foundation, a delegation of eight from Yunnan will visit organisations and projects on HIV/AIDS in Thailand in November prior to the CCA regional Consultation on 'AIDS: A Challenge for Religious Response'.

Prawate Khid-arn



Dr Wang Yun Sheng, director of Yunnan Provincial Public Health Bureau, giving a briefing on the HIV/AIDS situation in China





Action Needed on Refugees Issue

Churches urged to be in solidarity with refugees and displaced people

'Churches in Asia must include the issue of refugees and internally displaced communities in its holistic ministry.' Thus Dr Ahn Jae Woong, CCA General Secretary, challenged the participants of the 'CCA Strategic Workshop on Refugees and Internally Displaced Peoples and Asian Churches' Response' in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 21–26 July 2001.

He said, 'The refugees and internally displaced people issue is once again a burning issue in our time. CCA and Asian churches have been long involved in this issue. A lot of excellent recommendations were made, but not yet fully put into action.

'In doing this ministry, we need a strong theological and ethical foundation. Moreover, we need to pool our resources together, including human and non-human resources, to implement the programs,' he added.

Twenty participants from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka met to search for possible practical ways of being church in solidarity with refugees and internally displaced people in Asia. The program was held during the launching of the Decade to Overcome Violence in Sri Lanka in the midst of escalating violence.

Participants have causes for alarm:

- That despite having held quite a number of conferences, consultations and workshops on the subject

matter during the last decade or so, not much headway has been made on the implementation side and it appears that the recommendations therefrom have not been followed or taken seriously at various levels, owing to having a divergent understanding on the issue at hand.

- So far we have diagnosed the symptoms of the disease and found the root cause prevailing and spreading, but there has not been enough response to join in the effort for stopping the malaise.
- There appears to be a smokescreen of NGOs, government and business with regard to the 'charitable work' among the refugees and IDPs.
- Donors tend to favour the constituency highlighted and promoted by the media and other vested interests.
- To date, most nations in the Asian region have not become signatories to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees because of their own national policies and interests, which are detrimental to the refugees concerned.
- Even nations who have signed the convention are not serious in implementing its provisions in letter and spirit.

To strengthen churches' mission to the refugee and internally displaced people in Asia, participants therefore recommend:

- that the CCA initiates action on the recommendation of the Conference

on Migrant Workers, Refugees and Internally Displaced Communities in Asia held 22–26 November 1993, particularly with reference to Recommendations 4 and 5, i.e. 'to have an Asian ecumenical action and Asian Working Group',

- that national councils and member constituents of CCA should establish a desk for refugees, internally displaced people and migrant workers, that is if they do not have one yet,
- that there should be a monitoring and evaluation mechanism at various levels so that effective and accountable program of action will operate,
- that materials published in English should be concise to enable translation for utility purposes at the grassroots level,
- that networking should be pursued vigorously with CCA as the focal point,
- that bilateral relations between CCA constituent members, where applicable and possible, should be strengthened and encouraged,
- that the guiding principles with regard to internally displaced people be accepted and adopted by all national governments and the same be perused by both CCA and the WCC,
- that interfaith relationships and endeavour be promoted at all levels for joint and collective effort to achieve the common goal for equality and dignity.



Journeying Together

NCC women and education secretaries planning meeting

The CCA Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment program area gathered twenty-one national councils of churches women's desk secretaries/moderators and education secretaries on 18–23 June 2001 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for a strategic planning meeting. The meeting was hosted by the Women's Department of the Church of Christ in Thailand.

The group considered the varying sociopolitical, economic and cultural contexts of the different Asian countries and shared the following common issues and concerns:

- violence against women in its various forms and related issues, e.g. militarism and 'comfort' women, violence against women in the church, domestic violence, trafficking in women and children, prostitution, acid burning, dowry death, infanticide,
- women's leadership development —awareness raising, capability building for women, partnership of women and men in leadership, computer literacy, spiritual formation, ecumenical formation,
- aboriginal women's issues, migrant issues and refugee issues,
- building a culture of peace, women's solidarity and networking,
- ordination of women,
- ecumenical formation of children and youth,
- democratic education and religious freedom.

The respective journeys at the national level have not been easy. There is a great need for support, both financial and moral, from committee members and church leaders from member churches. Six women's desk secretaries/moderators are new in their post, four are soon leaving and replacements are being sought, and four are continuing for another few years. There are only six NCC education staff. At the regional level, there is challenge for a shared perspective on gender justice, support for staff development and strengthening working relationships between regional and national staff.

Dreams

As the participants began their journey together, they shared their dreams in concrete terms:

They envision a society where:

- every being can live in dignity,
- children's rights and humanity are affirmed and their gifts are nurtured,
- women and men work together as equals, affirming each other's gifts and differences,
- women and girls are considered just as important as men and boys,
- women and men share equally in decision making and leadership,
- the skills, experiences and talents of women are recognised and valued as much as those of men,
- people will be selected for positions on the basis of skills, knowledge and experience rather than gender,
- women and men have equal opportunities to be ordained and to serve in all positions in the churches,
- women and men live lives free from violence,
- the unpaid work of women (and



Four participants at the NCC women and education secretaries meeting





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some men) in the house and caring for family members is valued and recognised by both women and men,

- men take equal responsibility with women for the home and family life,
- women contribute equally with men in economic, cultural and political life,
- women are encouraged to take on leadership roles and not just supportive roles,
- men are encouraged to take on supporting roles and not just leadership roles,
- women experience positive self-esteem and have a strong sense of their own dignity and worth.

They envision a church:

- without violence against women,
- having diversity and using congregation's charisms,
- with a more participative structure,
- with integrity in its spirituality,
- creating a violence-free society so that every being can live in dignity.

Mission

The participants took the mission of women/gender justice and education desks as:

- fostering a liberating, holistic education towards peace with justice, reconciliation, integrity of creation and inclusive community at local, national and regional level,
- promoting the study of globalisation as an economic and political phenomenon, noting its impact on local culture and environment and social ethnic religious conflicts as well as its theological and moral implications,
- helping develop training programs on peace and conflict resolution,

- providing a critique of a secular education that promotes militarism, national ethnic religious chauvinism and indiscriminate acceptance of Western values and technology,
- encouraging gender awareness among women and men by providing information, publication and undertaking,
- ensuring that gender equality perspectives are included in decision-making and leadership,
- ensuring that the voices of women are heard and their concerns are addressed by the churches,
- sharing information with women and promoting solidarity among women around the world,
- promoting a culture of peace and respect for human rights,
- ensuring that education of children and young people reflects and promotes gender equality.

Goals

The shared goals for the next five years are:

- To train at least two facilitators/trainers from each country to lead gender awareness activities for women and men and be available to assist member churches and NCC's.
- To promote NCC women's desks' participation in each other's activities on shared concerns through the Women's Leadership Development Fund.
- To promote ecumenical formation on building a culture of peace that is gender sensitive and contributing to the whole global justice.
- To mainstream gender in religious education curriculum and proc-

esses for ecumenical formation.

- To develop the leadership potential of young women's groups.
- To strengthen and accelerate the process of equal and informed participation of women and men in the life and ministry of the church towards coming up with a definite policy on women.
- To create awareness on gender justice concerns, including the recognition and valuing of women's spirituality, leadership, wisdom to discern and decide, conviction and commitment and power and skills for building a transformed holistic community of women and men in home, church and society.
- To promote leadership development of church women in an alternative way and in rereading the Bible and to promote the theological education of women.
- To heighten the awareness and accountability of the church on the issue of violence against women in the church through publication of gathered case studies, analysis, theological reflections and strategies that are being used to address the issue.

As the national and regional staff work together in the coming years, there will be more focus on sharing resource materials that can be used for capability building, such as *Sowing the Grains of Peace: A Resource Handbook for Building Peace*, following up on churches' response to the issue of violence against women, supporting women's leadership development, joint program sponsorship and joint monitoring of progress of national activities for the Decade to Overcome Violence. *Cora Tabing-Reyes*



Urban Rural Mission in Action

CCA's Faith, Mission and Unity holds subregional people's forums

The CCA Faith, Mission and Unity program area recently organised some separate regional forums for its urban rural mission network to assess, plan and strategise. The uniqueness of these forums lies in each being based on the common needs of the subregion.

The Northeast Asia subregional forum was held in Seoul, Korea, on 18–21 July. It was jointly hosted by the National Council of Churches of Korea (NCCCK), the Korean Christian Action Organisation (KCAO) and the Yong Dong Po Urban Industrial Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK).

The Southeast Asia subregional forum was held in Davao City, Philippines, on 23–28 June, hosted by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines Program Unit on Faith Witness and Service.

The South Asia subregional forum, which was originally scheduled for 29 July – 1 August in Colombo, Sri Lanka, was cancelled due to the security situation in Colombo.

Northeast Asian Forum Revisits Migrant Issues

The Northeast Asia Subregional Forum on Migrant Issues brought together thirty-eight people, including migrant workers and social advocates and activists, to tackle the theme, 'Globalisation and the Right of Organisation of Migrant Workers'.

The goals of the forum were to examine the present conditions of migrant workers and the effects of globalisation on their rights, to define strategies that will resolve barriers and strengthen the unity of migrants and to plan on future activities that will foster solidarity among Northeast Asian migrant workers.

Using Korean realities as the backdrop of his keynote address, Prof. Kang Su-Dol of the Korea University pointed out that the problem of massive migration is not made by the people but by those who want to create more capital. He stressed that people

and their families have the right to be happy, and if this happiness is impinged when their basic needs are not met, they start to think of ways to improve them, one of which is by migrating. He added that the problems faced by migrant workers in Korea are not only economic but also cultural—the cultural differences which have often caused misunderstanding between them and the local people. He also said that violence committed against migrant workers is not temporary but structural—meaning the philosophy used by the Korean government is to use migrant workers as cheap labour. Added to that is the racist and too nationalistic policies that should be changed. We should open our minds as world citizens. These obstacles can be overcome by solidarity and by erasing stereotyping, racism, and narrow nationalism, he pointed out.

The discussion that followed the keynote address highlighted the following issues:

- that migrant workers, male or female, documented or undocumented, should have the right to organise,
- that women migrant workers are more vulnerable, especially with sex trafficking and violence committed against them,
- that the freedom of movement, as it is now, belongs only to a few and that the majority of the people are not free to move,
- that xenophobia is being fostered to create the idea that foreign workers are criminals,
- that religious prejudice and xenophobia against migrant workers prevail because of globalisation,
- that the main problem of undocumented workers is not the right to





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organise but legalisation or amnesty in order to become legal workers,

- that national sovereignty should take into consideration the plight of the people, including migrant workers.

Other activities at the forum were biblical and theological reflection by Dr Kang Won-Don, a sharing on international networking by Prof. Samuel Lee, member of the WCC Central Committee, and Ms Joy S. de Guzman, vice-chairperson of Migrante International, country sharing from the representatives of Northeast Asian states and an exposure visit to the Seoul Migrant Workers Centre and the An-San Migrant Centre.

Established in September 1996, the Seoul Migrant Workers Centre provides counselling and education, shelter, a medical mutual-aid union, free medical services, spiritual activities and formation of communities (i.e. migrant workers from Nepal, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan) and international family meetings. The An-san

Migrant Shelter was initiated and run by Rev. Park Chun-ung since 1996. It also provides shelter, medical, labour and other assistance to needy migrant workers from various nationalities. Both migrant worker centres provide support services, pastoral care and other assistance, which the Korean churches and other groups extend to migrant workers in Korea.

From the country sharing, it was noted that Northeast Asia (covering Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and Korea) is host to hundreds of thousands of migrant workers coming from poor countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. It was noted further that there are many problems arising from government policies (i.e. trainee system, immigration law etc.) regarding the import of foreign labour and that these policies infringe on the rights of migrant workers, such as the right to organise, the right to equal opportunities etc. Nevertheless, it was stressed that the presence of support mechanisms provided by churches and other groups have

helped alleviate the plight of migrant workers. In addition to the forum experiences, participants got a chance to express solidarity with migrant workers by joining a picket at Kwang Hwamun, Seoul, in front of Chong Wade (Blue House), where the President of Korea resides. The picket was to call for an end to the trainee system, which deprives the workers of their rightful wages and benefits. It also called for allowing work permit to migrant workers since 'migrants' rights are human rights'.

Among the follow-up work that participants recommended were:

- national level echo forums, lobbying, training/education for women migrants,
- regional level information exchange, homepage, ecumenism agenda for migrant workers,
- CCA level dissemination of in-depth theological studies and analysis regarding migrant workers as well as the holding of the next subregional workshop in Kaoshiung, Taiwan, in 2002.



Picket at Kwang Hwamun in Seoul, Korea: 'Abolish the Trainee System'





Southeast Asia Forum Looks at Religious and Ethnic Conflict

The Southeast Asian subregional forum in the Philippines brought together fifty participants, from Cambodia, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Philippines, and guests from Korea and the USA. It focused on the theme, 'Listen, Learn, Live the Gospel of Salvation amidst the Evils and Violence of Globalisation in Southeast Asia'. Resource persons included Muslim and indigenous people, activists and grassroots movement workers.

The overall objective of the forum was to provide a common view and understanding of the Asia-Pacific situation specifically of the intensifying religious conflict, ethnic discrimination and struggle for self-determination of peoples in Southeast Asia.

The specific objectives were for the participants to:

- provide data or information on the roots of religious conflict, racial and ethnic discrimination and struggle for self-determination in their respective countries,
- share their history of struggle for self-determination vis a vis globalisation,
- identify appropriate, concrete and realisable responses to support the movement of Christians, Muslims and people of other faiths in forging unity, in struggling for social justice, peace and equality,
- strengthen URM solidarity, networking and coordination in Southeast Asia.

The program included exposure to the Moro villages in North Cotabato, the site of the Dole company in South Cotabato, and an indigenous community of the B'laan in Malita, Davao del Sur.

Although the Moro villagers have been victims of the total war policy of the military, they understood the conflict to be one that has been created by the power elite so that they (the power elite) can exploit the rich natural resources of the area. The site of the Dole company includes large tracts of land that have been taken over by multinational companies for the planting and export of pineapple. The issues arising are not only the use of chemicals that destroy the soil and surrounding areas but also the cheap and back-breaking labour of workers with minimum pay. The community of B'laan was a showcase of the indigenous people's desire for self-determination so that they can preserve their land and their way of life.

In his opening remarks, Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja, joint executive secretary of CCA-FMU, reminded the participants that the enemies of Christians are not Muslim or other religious groups, rather, the common enemies of all religious groups are poverty, injustice, discrimination and greed for wealth and power.

Ms Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, General Secretary of NCCP, in her keynote address challenged participants to 'join the ranks of the excluded and the oppressed as they slowly but

surely march toward their Promised Land—there to claim the life abundant where freedom, self-determination and justice reign supreme.'

Another part of the program was an input on the Asia-Pacific situation by Ms Joy S. de Guzman, Vice-Chairperson of Migrante International. She mapped out present trends in the region concerning free market globalisation, the new world order, and Imperialist Aggression. There was also a country sharing by representatives from the different countries.

A biblico-theological reflection on religious conflict was given by Rev. Fr Ben Alforque, who pointed out that there is not a religious conflict, but a conflict created and manipulated by those who want to control and exploit the world's resources and maintain their power status. He said, 'Individual faiths and organised religions are real experiences of the quest for liberation and for answers to ultimate questions. In a deeper level, they are encounters of a living God, which the language of human experience of material reality can only metaphorically and inadequately articulate. In this sense can all people converge even in their differences.

Thus the great religions of Asia and those indigenous beliefs held on by indigenous peoples are transubstantiated in the actual struggles of peoples for liberation and fullness of life. It is our great joy, therefore, to forge unity of faith and religion among all peoples by celebrating the struggles of the poor





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where we discover the one God, one world and one future for us all.'

Another biblico-theological reflection on self-determination was led by Dr Robinson Montalba, who incorporated a discussion on the right to self-determination as provided by the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 1). He led a review of the struggle of the Hebrews against slavery in Egypt and for self-determination, which resulted in the birth of a new nation, a free nation which was economically, politically, culturally and religiously liberated. Self-determination is, therefore, the right of all people.

A panel discussion on self-determination was led by representatives of groups working with Muslims and indigenous people. Amirah Ali Lidasan of the Moro-Christian People's Alliance provided an excellent background on the Moro people's struggle for self-

determination. She emphasised that the Moro people's struggle for self-determination should not be viewed as the Moros' assertion of nationalism against their Filipino counterparts. Their struggle is part and parcel of the struggle of the Filipino people for land, life and liberation of the people. In the midst of our diversity in culture, religion and tribes, the answer to our liberation is a united and common struggle of the peoples of the Philippines against oppression and exploitation.

Benedict P. Solang, of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, shared the struggle of the native inhabitants of the Cordillera, collectively known as the Igorots, for self-determination. He stressed the need for participation of all people to build a truly just system where all people can determine their own destiny based on their own history, culture and traditions. 'As the struggle to change

the system cannot come from the ruling elite, though they are also targets for conscientisation, the sacrifice really must come from the ranks of the exploited and oppressed. In the ongoing struggle for self-determination in the Cordillera, much stress is given to the role of village peasants and indigenous elders and women, and of course the youth, teachers and other professionals, local government officials, business and church people. If we have sacrificed in the past, we sacrifice some more to lay the foundation of a brighter future for our children and succeeding generations.'

During the workshop on concrete responses to support movements, three groups discussed the issues of self-determination, increasing inter-religious conflict, and rights of workers. This resulted in a Unity Statement and Program of Action hereby summarised:



Participants at the Southeast Asia Forum in Davao City, Philippines





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- 1.1 We affirm that Southeast Asia has bountiful resources which imperialist globalisation wants to plunder. This causes severe misery, suffering and violence. Thus the contradiction between race, colour or religious affiliation is not the principal contradiction we are facing, and therefore the true enemy of the people is the idol of domination perpetuated by imperialist powers led by the US and Japan in conspiracy with the local reactionary ruling regimes and powers.
- 1.2 We have listened to the stories of suffering of the Moro people, the exploited agricultural workers of Dole Philippines and the indigenous *Lumads* (natives). We have seen their determination to struggle for justice.
- 1.3 We have learned that there is no fundamental religious conflict among peoples of other faith, that racial and ethnic discrimination is created by certain classes, persons and groups who wish to dominate and exploit, and that the struggle for self-determination of the Muslim and indigenous peoples would be supported because these are genuine struggles to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
- 1.4 Therefore we will strive for inter-religious dialogue, we will encourage heads of churches to articulate the concerns and demands of the people to their respective governments, we will do studies and facilitate venues where we can gain a deeper understanding of various ethnic groups and cultures, we will re-discover our history and redefine our mission based on the prevailing situation and needs of the peoples of Southeast Asia, and finally we will encourage our URM workers to exercise the principle of *kenosis* as a part of our way of life while serving God's people.
- 1.5 There is a need for revisiting the mission and church's history in Asia from the perspective of the victims. Redefining Asia's mission history becomes an urgent task for URM in their action and reflection process. Mission's practices in Asia need to consider the people through *metanoia* (repentance), *kenosis* (self-negation), and *agape* (love).

Grassroots Leadership Capacity Building in Burma

About thirty participants from different parts of Burma participated in the Grassroots Leadership Capacity Building in Yangon, 15–23 June. The program was jointly organised by the CCA-FMU and the Myanmar Council of Churches Urban Rural Mission Unit.

This program was designed to train and equip local URM workers with the necessary skills and tools in their ministry with the people. Most of the participants were field workers of the member churches of the Burma Council of Churches. There was also a significant number of young participants who were being initiated into the program.

The training was conducted in the local Burmese language and led by local ecumenical leaders. Topics included rural organising, organising for empowerment, and people-oriented management. The participants also discussed issues in the field such as poverty, landlessness, unemployment, forced relocation, forced labour etc.

The training started with a local exposure program to several villages and slum areas around Yangon.

Three resource persons from Hong Kong and India provided the larger Asian and ecumenical perspective. Rev. Josef Widyatmadja, joint executive secretary for CCA-FMU, spelled out the need to work with people from other

beliefs and faiths in a transforming life-centred society.

Spirituality of life should motivate URM people in struggling with people. In addition he provided the participants with an overview of CCA as well as the new structure of the FMU in which the URM is lodged.

Dr M.P. Joseph from India presented a paper on the effects of globalisation. Chan Beng Seng, executive director of DAGA, led the discussion on technology and the people's movement with a focus on how activists and action groups have been effectively using the Internet as a medium of organising, communication and campaign.





Youth Training Program

School for Ecumenical Leadership Formation 2001

A thirty-five-day training program on ecumenical leadership formation was held 15 July – 19 August in Chaing Mai, Thailand. It was jointly organised by CCA and the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region. A total of twenty-two youth and students from thirteen countries participated in the program. Of this number nearly 70 per cent were women.

The program aimed at providing comprehensive leadership formation for second-line leaders for SCMs and church youth sent by their NCCs. The major components of the program were inputs on different issues of our time, including globalisation, human rights and people's governance, feminism and the women's movement, ecology and sustainable development, the ecumenical movement, interfaith dialogue, and social movements.



In solidarity with the movement against the building of Pak Moon Dam

Exposures were also organised to enable participants to relate their learning with the people's lives and struggles, and to express solidarity with the local people. These included visits to different NGOs, the struggle against the building of Pak Moon Dam,

rural reliance projects, the invention of community currency in the Kud Chum district in northeast Thailand and refugees on the Thai-Burma border. Participants also learned about community organising and the skills that will facilitate their contribution to movement building when they go back home.

There were many unforgettable moments, including the twenty-hour bus ride to reach the exposure site, the challenge to build a sensitive community and live together for five weeks. From the evaluation and response, participants found this training program very useful and valuable. They were challenged to be the agents of change back in their own communities. For the future, they suggested more specific and tailored-made training programs for different levels of participants. *Cynthia Yuen*



Reading the Signs of Time: keynote presentation by Dr Kim Yong Boek





Environmental Training Program

The church's ethical and religious responsibility to the environment

Twenty-seven people representing member churches in Asia participated in an Environmental Training Program organised by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Korean Christian Cooperation for Social Development (KCCSD). The program was held at the 'Wind and Water Institute' in Kyonggi-Do, Korea, on 27–25 July.

Dr Prawate Khid-arn, the CCA Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, stressed that the environmental issue is an integrated one, involving natural science, social science, ethics and religious responsibility. It is our ethical mandate as church people to protect God's creation and sustain it for the betterment of the universe and all its inhabitants.

Prof. Dr Samuel Lee emphasised that 'the world environmental issues are almost always connected with human rights issues relating to justice, peace and development. As a result, these have often become politically sensitive issues.'

In a letter to churches in Asia, participants of the program emphasised that 'the church is the salt of the earth. We should be a beacon of light that gives hope to the world and beckons all to follow as partners with God in the renewal of creation. The church has a responsibility to educate its people to live in sustainable community with God's creation.'

The letter also said, 'Traditionally the Christian church has focused more on the sharing of the gospel and serving the needs of people.

'Unfortunately in some areas this has been to the detriment of the environment.

'This is often due to lack of environmental awareness amongst church leaders in developing countries. In economically stable countries, within Asia and the Pacific region, where there is an opportunity for environmental action, people have not risen to the challenge.'

Concerned about the global environmental crisis, participants also wrote an 'open letter' to President George W. Bush of the United States of America, urging him to support the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. 'We are ... alarmed and concerned about your recent decision not to support the Kyoto Protocol process as it is a mandate for all Christians to be stewards

of God's creation and we strongly believe that the Kyoto Protocol is a crucial and urgent move to start the mitigation of global warming. Since the United States of America is the largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in the world, you, as the President, bear a prime moral responsibility to rectify this situation.'

The meeting also challenged Asian churches in all levels—regional, national and local—to identify strategies to promote environmental conservation through



The participants in the CCA Environmental Training Program during a session of biblical reflection and study





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awareness building and active programs.

Recommendations to regional bodies included:

- promoting networking through various media,
- collecting Christian resources on the environment and distributing them to member churches.

Recommendations to national churches included:

- providing financial assistance to promote eco-awareness training

programs, especially to those in ministry roles,

- encouraging more people to be involved in environmental activities,
- writing to government offices to enlighten them about the church's environmental activities,
- working with other environmental organisations,
- preparing resources for church groups,
- promoting environmental concerns through the mass media.

Recommendations to local churches included:

- introducing environmental education in Sunday schools, women's fellowships, youth and young adult fellowships and in worship,
- providing environmental tips and themes of the week, e.g. in bulletins,
- conducting outdoor picnics and services so people can get in touch with nature.

Prawate Khid-arn

Promoting Life

CCA and WCC hold forum on anti-racism

As part of the global ecumenical movement for human rights, about forty participants representing the member churches of the Christian Conference of Asia and the Pacific Council of Churches gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, during 17–19 May 2001 for the Asia Pacific Forum on Anti Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The theme was 'Promoting Life to Overcome Violence and Discrimination'.

In his opening worship, Dr A.A. Yewangoe emphasised the need for Christians to be involved in combating racism.

Several speakers from Asia and the Pacific were in the meeting, including Wong Kai Shing from the Asian Human Rights Commission, Fr Kevin from Fiji and Professor Ahmed Maarif from Muhamadiyah Muslim Organisation in Indonesia. Marillia Schuller, from the Program to Combat Racism—WCC,

and Pauline Muchina, WCC consultant for the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, were also in the meeting.

The forum was jointly organised by the WCC and the program area on Faith, Mission and Unity of the CCA. It was cohosted by the Church of Christ in Thailand.

The three-day forum reaffirmed sisterhood and brotherhood among Asian and Pacific churches and provided a venue for the participants to voice their concerns about racial issues. They also expressed their aspirations for more church involvement to confront all forms of discrimination.

Discussions in the meeting were sometimes intense and challenging and at other times light-hearted as participants shared their experiences and stories of despair and hopes about confronting racism in the Asia-Pacific

region. They identified some of the common causes of discrimination, starting with colonisation, dispossession and land exploitation. Globalisation has continued and exacerbated this process.

Other factors include uneven economic distribution, caste discrimination, voting apartheid and forced assimilation of minorities.

The forum also acknowledged that Christianity has sometimes been used to justify racial discrimination. Christianity should never become a narrow ideology used to support nationalism, domination and self-interest. The church should work towards a new world order of inclusiveness, love, forgiveness, justice, peace and liberation.

At the conclusion of the forum, the participants proposed that a regional network be established to enable the sharing of experiences and information. The forum also encouraged the





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churches to network with other NGOs and civil society movements in the region in promoting interfaith and inter-race dialogues. The participants also

strongly supported the call by Asian churches and NGOs for the inclusion of the issue of caste discrimination into the discussion and agenda of the UN

World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa.

India's Caste System Cited a Crime against Humanity

An international conference, organised by the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) on discrimination in India's caste system in New Delhi on 1–4 March, called the Indian government and the world to end such a 'crime against humanity'. The conference demanded that caste system be put on the agenda of the UN conference on racism in South Africa.

Caste discrimination (which is occupation and descent based) and the practice of untouchability have victimised India's 180 million Dalits, whose status is considered too low to be ascribed a caste. Dalits and tribal people are officially considered the 'scheduled castes and scheduled tribes'. While India's rich classes depend on the labour of the scheduled castes who are assigned the menial and degrading jobs, the Dalits live segregated from them.

The conference was sponsored by three dozen Indian and international groups, as well as church groups including the National Council of Churches in India. It was part of the preparation for the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR).

At the end of a four-day intense debate, the conference, in a declaration, 'condemned the attempts of the government of India to oppose the inclusion of caste-based discrimination in the agenda of the WCAR' and urged 'other governments to support the inclusion of caste-based discrimination in the WCAR agenda'. The conference declaration was based on a series of first-hand testimonies presented by Dalits at the start of the conference, even at the risk of being attacked for publicising their experiences of discrimination.

summarised from Ecumenical News International

Parallels between Racial and Caste Discriminations

Racial and caste discriminations are both social constructs, created by forces in society who seek to divide the powerful from the powerless. Thus wrote David Haslam in his article, 'Caste and the World Conference against Racism' in the June 2001 issue of *Dalit International Newsletter*.

Both are human inventions and both use the same mechanisms of oppression—economic oppression over jobs, land ownership and access to capital, social oppression such as lack of access to education, health, decent housing and all the other expected equalities of treatment in life.

In caste discrimination, however, there is the concept of purity/pollution, where one group is said to be pure and other groups are polluted—thereby creating a kind of psychological oppression.

Since untouchability has been made illegal, upper castes do not practise it outwardly but still it continues in various forms, i.e. in mental untouchability. Hence, when India was terribly hit by the deadly earthquake early this year, the structure of casteism remained unshaken by it. The town of Gujarat, for example, has six distinct tent camps for the earthquake homeless, separated by caste or religion.



Welcome Mandy Tibbey

New Associate General Secretary for Finance

Amanda Jane 'Mandy' Tibbey, a lawyer and laywoman from the Anglican Church in Australia, has joined the CCA as associate general secretary for finance effective 1 September 2001 for a term of four years.

Mandy's ecumenical involvements include work with students, the churches and ecumenical bodies, both in Australia and internationally. She served with the Australian Student Christian Movement and the Australian Council of Churches.

On the staff of the ACC, she deputised with Australian churches in relation to human rights issues in the Philippines, including managing the budget of the desk.

Mandy has also served as a representative of the Anglican Church to the Christian World Service Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

This commission's task is the management and oversight, including financial oversight, of the NCCA program in areas of international aid and development, disaster relief, refugee work and development education, mainly in Asia and the Pacific.

Her experience with the commission has made her very familiar with the project cycle, ensuring ongoing sustainability of programs, appropriate reporting and disbursement of funding and reporting to Australian partners, including the Australian government, where funds are provided to



Mandy Tibbey

NCCA-supported programs.

Her work with the World Student Christian Federation included being vice chairperson and then chairperson of the WSCF Asia-Pacific Committee, and cocoordinator of its human rights program. She was the WSCF representative to two joint meetings of the WSCF and CCA.

Mandy Tibbey was cosponsored to go to the Philippines to work with the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace by the then CCA Mission and Evangelism Desk. In this work, she took part in documenting human rights abuses by military and assisting in running campaigns about those abuses. While in the Philippines, she helped seek funds for small organisations and saw the necessity for good relationships with funding bodies, accountability, transparency, finding the

right partners and excellence in program delivery, reporting, review and evaluation of programs.

She took part in World Council of Churches meeting on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation and joined its June 2000 election monitoring group for the Zimbabwe elections.

Mandy earned her Bachelor of Jurisprudence and Bachelor of Laws from the University of New South Wales. She has completed a solicitors practical legal training course, which includes accounting and trust account management and holds a Graduate Certificate in Management. Her research thesis for her Masters of Laws was on child sexual assault remedies and law of damages. She is currently studying for a Doctor of Juridical Science.

Her most recent work experience is as legal officer and convenor of the Human Rights Unit of the Legal Aid Commission of NSW. In this capacity she has conducted cases that raise human rights issues including racial, sex, disability, sexuality discrimination and migration slavery.

As a lawyer, Mandy is comfortable in an adversarial setting but also has professional qualifications in mediation. Her exposure to other faiths and cultures makes her very comfortable in crosscultural communication.

Apart from her work-related involvements, Mandy has interests in music, dance and arts including theatre, and playing the cello and piano.



Reconciliation and Reunification

Korean–German consultation reflects on churches’ role in national reconciliation

The eighth German–Korean church consultation held on 7–9 July at the Christian Academy in Seoul, Korea, focused on the sharing of the German church’s experience and contribution to the process of German reunification and the search for ways the Korean churches may contribute to the reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula. The consultation theme was ‘Reconciliation and the Role of Churches’.

Dr Wirgen Schmude, President of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), shared that reconciliation is ‘achieved in the process of actualising the truth’. For Germany, the process included efforts to clarify responsibility for war, to uphold justice and truth, to bring West and East Germany closer together and to make new recommendations for unity.

Bishop Lee Jong Bok, President of the National Council of Churches in Korea, shared about the process of reconciliation that has taken place with regard to the Kwangju democratic movement. This includes the fact-finding and recovery of the honour of the Kwangju people.

The two church bodies adopted a joint declaration underlining their solidarity with each other and with the world churches for reconciliation and reunification of Korea. The declaration also urged the United States to denounce its missile defence system plan, which promotes a renewed armaments race among the world pow-

ers, including Russia and China, and leading to a new cold war that could bring suffering to people and hinder the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.

These bilateral relations between Korean and German churches have been carried on since 1965. The two bodies recognised how much they shared in common in terms of having been divided countries and longing for reconciliation and reunification. Germany became reunified in 1990 but Korea remains divided till today.

*Reconciliation
is achieved in
the process of
actualising the
truth*

Their joint statement said: ‘We are suffering as a consequence of wrong politics which brought on terrible wars (the Second World War, 1939–1945, and the Korean War, 1950–1953). While Germany was divided in consequence of the war itself had made and lost, Korea is divided in the interests of the superpowers and the result of the division was a tragic war. Koreans

fought against Korean, and came to live in enmity with each other.’

In support of the reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula, the churches in Germany cooperated and enabled representatives of churches in North and South Korea to meet in Germany in 1989 and 1997. Churches in both countries have also joined in wide humanitarian support for the suffering people in North Korea, an act which helped solidify relationships between Christians in the North and South.

Declaring that reconciliation requires remembrance and bringing the truth to light, the two bodies demanded that the distorted history textbooks allowed by the Japanese government to be published and used, be revised, and that Japan must make a clear apology for its atrocities committed during the Second World War, especially for the ‘comfort women’ who were forced to serve as prostitutes for the Japanese army.

In order to pave the way for reconciliation, the twenty-one representatives from the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) asked their respective governments to hold another summit meeting (as agreed in Pyongyang in June 2000) as soon as possible to fulfil their agreement on reconciliation and reunification.

*summarised from
Activity News, NCKK*



People

Australia

The Rev. **John Henderson** has been appointed as the new General Secretary for the NCCA. He is a Lutheran local church pastor with experience in local ecumenism.

India

Dr. **Samson Prabhakar** has been appointed Director of Research of the BTESSC and SATHRI effective 1 June. Prabhakar has considerable teaching experiences at the United Theological College and has been involved with the work of SATHRI as one of the guides for students in the area of Christian Education.

Prabhakar succeeded Dr **K.C. Abraham**, who will be teaching at the San Francisco Theological Seminary in California for a year.

On 28 May the Most Rev. **Cyril Mar Baseliose Episcopa** was consecrated as the Metropolitan (archbishop) of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, while the Most Rev. **Joseph Mar Koorilose Metropolitan** was installed as Valiya Metropolitan.

The Rev. Fr **Collin Christopher Theodore** was consecrated bishop of the Diocese of Rajasthan, Church of North India, on 27 May and installed on 31 May. He is the fourth presbyter of St James Church to be consecrated as bishop.

Rev. **Prem Kumar Moshe Dhotekar** was consecrated as the fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Nagpur, Church of North India on 10 June at All Saints Cathedral. He was installed later on the same day.

Indonesia

Rev. **I.W.J. Hendriks** was elected moderator of the Protestant Church in the Moluccas during its thirty-fourth assembly recently. Elected as vice moderators were Rev. **L. Lohy** and Rev. **H.S. Leleury**. Rev. **S.J. Mailoa** and Rev. **W. Davidz** were elected as general secretary and vice-general secretary, respectively.

The East Java Christian Church held its ninety-first general synod in Pujiarjo village parish, East Java, Indonesia, on 5–11 July 2001. The synod elected the new leadership of the church for the period 2001–2004: Rev. Dr **Bambang Ruseno Utomo**, MA, as new President and Rev. **Suwignjo**, as Vice President. Rev. **Drijandi L. Sigilipoe** continues to serve as the General Secretary. The new Vice General Secretary is Rev. **Suwignjo Suwondo** and the Treasurers are Mr **Astiko Akas**, and Rev. **S. Heli Safwan**. Ten persons were elected as members of the synod, one representative from each presbytery. The outgoing President, Rev. **S. Wismoady Wahono**, former Moderator of CCA Theological Concerns (1995–2000) had served as President of this church for three consecutive terms.

Taiwan

The Rev. Dr **Ng Pek-ho** (known in Mandarin Chinese as **Hwang Po-ho**) was elected as the moderator of the Council for World Mission for the next biennium. He is the first East Asian to hold the post. He is also the director of the Research and Development Center at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and an acting associate General Secretary there.

Two members of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) were recently appointed by the Taiwan government as roving ambassadors in areas of their specific expertise. Serving for a one-year term without pay, roving ambassadors are members from the general citizenry with experiences in international representation. Appointed were Ms **Ruth Kao Li Li-Chen** as roving ambassador in the field of women's concerns, and the Rev. Dr **Tong Chun-Fa** as roving ambassador for aboriginal issues. Ruth Kao is a member of the board of End Childhood Prostitution and the Taipei Women's Development Center, and consultant to the 21st Century Women's Association. She is also a former member of the CCA presidium (1985–1990). Tong Chun-Fa is the president of the Yu-shan Theological College.

M.A. Thomas Human Rights Award

A social activist in the southern Indian state of Karnataka has received a national human rights award set up in memory of a Protestant priest.

Dr H. Sudarshan, a medical doctor in his late forties, who works among the Soliga tribals (a semi-nomadic tribe) was given the M.A. Thomas National Human Rights Award for 2001 at a function held in Bangalore on 10 August. The chief justice of Karnataka, Mr P.V. Reddi, presented the award.

The award, instituted by the Vigil India Movement (VIM) in memory of



its founder-president, Rev. Dr M.A. Thomas, who passed away in 1993, consists of a cash prize of one lakh (approx. US\$2,120) and a citation. Rev. M.A. Thomas, an ordained priest of the Mar Thoma church, founded the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore in 1963, and developed it into a meeting place of all religious and political views. He was also the president of the Association of Christian Institutes for Social Concern in Asia.

Dr Sudarshan, who had received the Right Livelihood Award (alternative Nobel prize) earlier, for his 'crusade for the welfare and uplift of Karnataka's Soliga tribals' was chosen by a three-member jury from among 210 nominations received from all over the country. Dr Sudarshan is also the chairman of the Task Force on Health and Family Welfare in Karnataka. According to the VIM, 'Dr Sudarshan gave voice to hundreds of voiceless Soliga tribals by embedding a sense of self-respect in them, and a sense of courage to stand up.'

'Soliga tribes are my entire family and I will do anything to improve their life,' the medical doctor, who is a bachelor, said. VIM said that 'he showed the way to balance the imperatives of development with preservation of ethnic identity'.

The M.A. Thomas Award, started in 1993, is given every year to individuals or organisations in India who have made 'significant contributions for the protection and promotion of human rights in India'. Among the previous awardees are Mr Justice V.M. Tharkunde, Ms Medha Patkar and the People's Union for Civil Liberties.

Philip Mathew

Second Ecumenical Lecture Series

In an effort to promote ecumenism in the local context, the CCA initiated this year the Ecumenical Lectures Series with the Rev. Kwok Nai Wang as first lecturer at Payap University. After attending the Asia Regional Group meeting of the WCC in Colombo, Sri Lanka, last July, CCA General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong met with Fr Aloysius Pieris, SJ, an eminent theologian, at his residence in the Tulana Research Centre, Gonawala-Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. Fr Pieris has agreed to deliver three lectures sometime in early part of next year as the second series of the CCA Ecumenical Lectures.

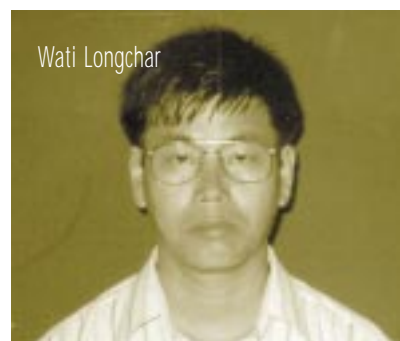


Ahn Jae Woong and Aloysius Pieris

New Consultant

Dr Wati Longchar, a Baptist theologian from Nagaland in North East India, has been appointed as Ecumenical Theological Education Consultant for two years beginning on 1 June 2001. The appointment was made jointly by the CCA and WCC.

The first Northeast Indian to be on the WCC and CCA staff, Wati has fifteen years of teaching, was dean for five years and then, more recently, acting principal at the Eastern Theological College in Assam, India. He has authored and edited several books and published many articles, most of which



have been on tribal theology. Wati will be based in Eastern Theological College in Assam. His work as theology consultant includes the regions of Asia and the Pacific.



Toraja Church Elects New Officers



The Toraja Church of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, held its Twenty-first General Synod Meeting in Palopo, South Sulawesi, on 9–18 July 2001. Attended by 1,300 participants, the meeting was held with the theme 'God is my strength and song' (Psalm 118:14) and the sub-theme 'With the strength from God, together we build a new Indonesia which is democratic, just and peaceful, as manifestation of the signs of the kingdom of God'.

The synod adopted the programmatic guidance for the development of Toraja Church for 2001–2006, which highlights its vision to enable the local congregations to further improve the quality of fellowship, witness and service.

To achieve this vision, the synod emphasised that the programs of Toraja Church be centred on the development of (a) contextual theology, (b) holistic spirituality, (c) mission-oriented congregation, (d) human resources and (e) responsible stewardship.

In addition, the synod urged the congregations to:

- take seriously the pluralistic realities of Indonesia,

- develop ecumenical cooperation as well as cooperation with people of other faiths in responding to the common concerns in the community;
- give priority to the formation and education programs for lay and clergy,
- provide special assistance for the empowerment of youth and women,
- facilitate the ministry for and with migrant workers who primarily come from the area of ministry of Toraja Church.

The synod elected the following new leaders for 2001–2006, Chairman Soleman Batti, and chairpersons Henriette T. Hutabarat-Lebang, Daud Sumbung and Daud Malamassam, General Secretary M.Y. Dera, Vice General Secretary Lewi Randan and General Treasurer Yoram Paratte.

Rev. Henriette Hutabarat, who has served CCA as Associate General Secretary for almost ten years, will return to Toraja upon completion of her service with CCA in December. She will take up her new full-time assignment as chairperson of Toraja Church in charge of formation and mission, beginning on 1 January 2002. In the fifty-

four years of the history of Toraja Church, she is the first woman to be elected to the leadership of the synod.

Toraja Church is a member of the Christian Conference of Asia, with almost 400,000 members, around 470 pastors and about 900 congregations spread in seven provinces in Indonesia.

Indian Baptist Leader Passes Away

The Rev. Dr Danamiah, a senior leader of the STBC (Samabesha of Telugu Baptist Churches) passed away on Monday, 16 July 2001, at his house in Kurnool. Dr Danamiah was a very active leader of his church, the STBC, and also a member of the Finance Committee of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). His immense contribution to the STBC and to the NCCI cannot be replaced in his untimely death.

Ipe Joseph, NCCI





OBITUARY

Stanley Jedidiah Samartha

Well-known Indian theologian passes away

The Rev. Dr Stanley Jedidiah Samartha, well-known Indian theologian and an authority on inter-religious dialogue, passed away in Bangalore on 22 July at the age of 81. He was ill for the last several months.

Samartha was the founder-director of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies from 1970–1981.

In a message of condolence, the WCC said that 'Dr Samartha is remembered with great respect and appreciation for his remarkable contribution to the ecumenical movement and his pioneering efforts in making the concern for dialogue with neighbours of other faiths an enduring commitment in the World Council of Churches. Those who worked with him speak of his clarity of vision, his excellent leadership and his meticulousness in research and expression. He created space for representatives of other faiths, inviting them in openness and generosity to the table for dialogue. His contributions have set the stage for all subsequent work the WCC has done in inter-faith dialogue.'

An ordained pastor of the Church of South India (CSI), Samartha was the first Indian principal of the Karnataka Theological College (formerly Basel Evangelical Mission Seminary) in Mangalore, Karnataka. He began his



Stanley Jedidiah Samartha

Christian ministry there as a lecturer in theology.

Later, he served as principal of the Serampore College in Calcutta. He was a visiting professor at the United Theological College in Bangalore. He also taught at theological colleges in the United States of America, Canada and the Netherlands. He was also a consultant to the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society and the South Asian Theological Research Institute in Bangalore.

The acting General Secretary of the WCC, Mr Georges Lemopoulos, said that the Indian church has lost a great leader, particularly in the area of theo-

logical education. He has left 'a lasting impression on theological education in India and beyond because of his commitment to ensure that all students of theology learn about the living faiths in Asia'.

'Theological education has been blessed by him,' CSI Bishop J.W. Gladstone said during Samartha's funeral on 24 July. Bishop Gladstone noted that Samartha was 'a man of vision and a great servant of God'.

Samartha studied at Madras University, United Theological College, Union Theological Seminary in New York and the Hartford Seminary Foundation. He also did post-graduate studies at the University of Basel.

He has more than ten books and nearly a thousand articles, research papers, sermons, Bible studies and book reviews to his credit. Among his books are *Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, *The Other Side of the River*, *The Search for New Hermeneutics in Asian Christian Theology* and *Courage for Dialogue*. His book, *One Christ—Many Religions*, was published Orbis Books, Mayknoll, in 1991.

A book he wrote a few months before his death was titled *I Could Not Go to Church on Good Friday*.

Samartha is survived by his wife and three children.

Philip Mathew





National Council of Churches— Bangladesh

A Short History

The present *Jatiya Church Parishad* or National Council of Churches—Bangladesh was actually established in 1949 in what was then East Pakistan, having the name East Pakistan Christian Council. All the mainline Protestant churches cooperated in the EPCC. The council's assembly formed committees with representatives from all the cooperating churches to carry on functions on behalf of EPCC.

Then came the war of liberation and through a freedom fighting movement a sovereign country, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, emerged in 1971. The EPCC, through a resolution of the Christian leaders, was turned into the National Council of Churches—Bangladesh.

At present there are six member bodies cooperating with the council.

These are the Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha, the Bogra Christian Church, the Church of God, the United Church of Bangladesh, the Hills Tracts Presbyterian Church and the Bangladesh Evangelical Baptist Fellowship.

There are also seven associate member bodies cooperating with the council. They are the Bangladesh Methodist Church Trust, the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, the Christian Medical Association of Bangladesh, the Dishary Foundation, the Community Health Care Project, the Bangladesh Bible Society and the Church of Christ in Bangladesh.

Based on the population of the individual member churches, representatives serve on the council. Elections are held on every alternate year at the annual general meeting. The

president and other officebearers are elected in the assembly, along with seven other moderators to be head of seven different working components for the next two years. The seven different components are the Department of Education, the Department of Medical Services, the Department of Development, Justice and Peace, the Department of Youth and the Department of Communication and Publication. The council is financially poor and often needs help from other churches and ecumenical bodies.

The ecumenical pilgrimage of the council has been continuing for a long time but there are also hindrances. We observe Asian Sunday every year to remember our sisters and brothers. As a minority community, our greatest weakness is division, as we are divided into so many denominations.



Participants of the Mission and Vision Consultation organised by the NCC—Bangladesh in September 1999





FEATURE

Since we are a small minority community in a very plural society, we have encountered so many problems. Pray for the people of the country so that a peaceful atmosphere shall exist. Recently violence occurred in the country.

Bangladesh is prone to natural disasters. We need every prayer so that our almighty God will help us to

stand firmly during these natural disasters and help other needy people in critical times.

We need prayers from our Christian sisters and brothers from all corners to strengthen our witness in our motherland, Bangladesh.

*Subodh Adhikary,
General Secretary, NCC Bangladesh.*

Building Unity among Bangladeshi Churches

The Catholic Archbishop of Dhaka, Michael Rosario, called on Bangladeshi Christians to look beyond their denominational differences and 'discover the Bangladesh Christ'. He described the disunity among Bangladesh churches as 'close to a scandal' where there is the Catholic Christ, the Baptist Christ, the Methodist Christ and the Anglican Christ.

His remarks were made at a meeting on 12 March to a delegation led by Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He declared his church's openness to joining hands with the National Council of Churches—Bangladesh to ensure the unity of all Christians, which he called an urgent necessity to enable Christians to witness to their faith in an overwhelmingly Muslim nation.

In Bangladesh, over 90 per cent of the 130 million people are Muslims, while Christians constitute about 0.3 per cent. Of the 400,000-strong Christian community, two-thirds are Catholics, while the other main churches are Evangelical and mainstream Protestant.

Dr Raiser commented that division among churches



Dr. Konrad Raiser laying the foundation stone of the Ecumenical Centre at the premises of the NCC in Bangladesh

was often rooted in the 'an ability to see beyond one's own horizon'. He pointed to the close cooperation between the Christian Conference of Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences as a very encouraging

mark of the growing relations of churches. This co-operation should be extended to local situations like Bangladesh, the WCC General Secretary said.

This was the first visit by a WCC General Secretary to Bangladesh.

*summarised from
Ecumenical News
International*



Archbishop Michael Rosario with Dr Raiser

