

ccanews



Twelfth General Assembly, Chiang Mai

Signing off ...



Cover: The banner, which graphically portrayed the theme of CCA's twelfth general assembly, 'Building Communities of Peace for All' and had a prominent place at the front of the meeting room, was a piece of collective art by artists from UGATLAHI.

Many of the photographs of the assembly in this issue were taken by Pyo Hyun Mo from Korea. Others were taken by Hisashi Yukimoto, Philip Mathew and Geoff Alves.

This issue of *CCA News* is largely a general assembly issue. The twelfth general assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, held in Chiang Mai from 31 March to 6 April 2005, went very well—some 500 people attended. A massive effort went into the planning and organising the assembly. I am indeed grateful to the local organising committee in Chiang Mai, the Church of Christ in Thailand, Payap University, my colleagues, CCA officers, committee members and others for their valuable efforts and cooperation in conducting the assembly successfully. We were very privileged to have many senior ecumenical leaders and church dignitaries at the assembly, including the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr Sam Kobia.

This issue sheds light on some important events and decisions that happened before and during the assembly. Among them is the election of Dr Prawate Khid-arn as the new general secretary of the CCA by the general committee held prior to the assembly. The assembly took a decision to move the CCA office to Chiang Mai, which is expected to reduce the operating costs of the CCA drastically.

Among the many highlights of the assembly were the opening and closing worships held at the First Church of the Church of Christ in Thailand and at the chapel at the Payap University respectively. Another important event that took place was the launch of the Decade to Overcome Violence Asia Focus 2005. Brief reports of these events are included in this issue.

The reports of the four pre-assembly events and the D.T. Niles Memorial lectures have also found place in this issue, which I hope are informative and beneficial to readers.

In my report to the assembly, I made the suggestion of setting up an Ecumenical Peace Congress (EPC). I would like to reiterate this. In my opinion, EPC could be an open and autonomous forum comprising ecumenical bodies to share each other's vision and build communities of peace in our midst. It could also involve peace building, strategy formulation for peace education and advocacy work, resource sharing for exchange of personnel and experts, information sharing or networking for peace mission and articulation of a theology of peace. I hope the new leadership of the Asian ecumenical movement will pick up this idea and follow it up with all seriousness.

The time to say goodbye to you has now come. This will be the last time I will be writing to you as the CCA general secretary and editor-in-chief of *CCA News*. I am leaving CCA after working as its general secretary for the last few years.. These have been wonderful years, which gave me rich experiences. There were also times of difficulties and moments of challenges, which I was able to overcome with the support, prayer and cooperation of many of you. I want to take this opportunity to express my deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to each one of you for upholding me and sustaining me.

My wife, son and I moved to our new home on the outskirts of Seoul, Korea, at the end of May. Our address in Seoul is 1303-701 Sam Hwan Apt, 1584 Tan Hyun-dong, Il Shan-ku, Ko Yang City, Kyong Gi-do, Korea (telephone (home): + 82 (02) 921 5070, mobile: + 82 (0) 10 7407 5070. Please write to us when you get time, and visit us when you are in Seoul.

I am sure our paths will cross somewhere, sometime in the future. Till then, I want to wish you all the best wherever you are and whatever you are doing. May God bless you.

—Abn Jae Woong

Building communities of peace for all

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CCA's twelfth general assembly, Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Twelfth general assembly

Building communities of peace for all

Five hundred people from different parts of Asia and beyond gathered at the First Church in Chiang Mai on 31 March 2005 for worship, which marked the opening of the twelfth general assembly of CCA, with the theme, 'Building communities of peace for all'.



The presidents at the opening worship

After the service the delegates were treated to a sumptuous dinner and cultural presentations before they returned to the Lotus Hotel, the venue of the assembly, for national meetings.



Preaching at a local church

On Sunday, 3 April, the assembly participants worshipped at over 40 churches in and around Chiang Mai. Some of the ecumenical leaders attending the assembly gave sermons during the services.



The assembly in session

Sixteen leaders, representing different ecumenical organisations and partner agencies, brought greetings to the assembly.

Cultural presentations by traditional northern Thai dancers were held during dinner, and the opening and closing worship.

Northern Thai food



Korean cultural performance

The National Group of Music and Dance from Korea performed Korean traditional music and dance on the second day of the assembly.

The delegates heard reports from the presidium, general secretary and honorary treasurer on the day the assembly officially began.



A major input on the theme came in the form of the D.T. Niles Memorial Lectures, delivered by Dr Sam Kobia, Dr James Haire and Dr Christine Loh. A panel discussion on interfaith co-operation in Asia was also held as

Sam Kobia, WCC general secretary

part of the lectures. Swami Agnivesh and Dr Asghar Ali Engineer were the panelists.

A major highlight of the assembly was the formal launch of the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence Asia Focus 2005. 'Asia will be the window for the rest of the world through which the eyes of the world will see how overcoming violence is being done by the churches in Asia,' said the WCC general secretary, Dr Sam Kobia.

One of the important decisions the assembly took was to accept the recommendation of a task force to relocate the CCA office to Chiang Mai in Thailand within 18 months.

The assembly delegates witnessed the release of the two volumes of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, written and edited respectively by Ninan Koshy, and, *God Who Matters*, by Ahn Jae Woong.



Dancers at Kantoke dinner

The last two days of the assembly mainly focused on CCA program reviews and program directions.

The assembly closed with worship at the chapel of the Payap University on 5 April. Senior ecumenical leader and a former general secretary of the East Asian Christian Conference, Dr Kyaw Than, delivered the sermon. The newly elected officers and general committee members were installed during the worship by outgoing president Bishop Dr Joseph Mar Irenaeus.



Daily worship Stewards



New appointments

New presidents, general secretary and committees announced at general assembly

General Secretary

The general committee of the CCA, which met on 31 March in Chiang Mai, Thailand, elected Dr Prawate Khid-arn as the new general secretary of CCA for a term of five years. He assumed office on 1 June. Prawate was previously CCA's associate general secretary for finance.

Born in Chiang Rai, Thailand, in 1952, Prawate studied theology and philosophy at Payap University and community development at Thammasat University. He earned a PhD in community development from the University of the Philippines in 1992.

Prawate taught at the Payap University from 1984 to 1989, before joining the CCA as executive secretary for Development and Service. Later he became joint executive secretary for the Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service program area.

Prawate, a member of the Church of Christ in Thailand, has attended several international conferences on poverty, com-

munity organisation and ecology. He has a wife, Somsri, and two children, who live in Bangkok.

Presidents

The CCA general assembly elected Ms Lu Yueh-Wen (Taiwan), Ms Manju Baroi (Bangladesh), Rev Dr Khamphone Kounthapanya (Laos) and Rev Francisco Maria De Vasconcelos (Timor Lorosa'e) as the new presidents of CCA.

Lu Yueh-Wen

Lu Yueh-Wen from Taiwan is executive secretary for the Youth Concerns Office of the Geneva-based World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). As a member of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, she attended the Youth Triennium of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. She also represented her church at the 8th general assembly of the WCC held in Harare, Zimbabwe. Yueh-Wen is a member of the WCC-Pentecostals Joint Working

Group. She attended the general assembly of CCA representing the National Council of Churches of Taiwan.

Manju Baroi

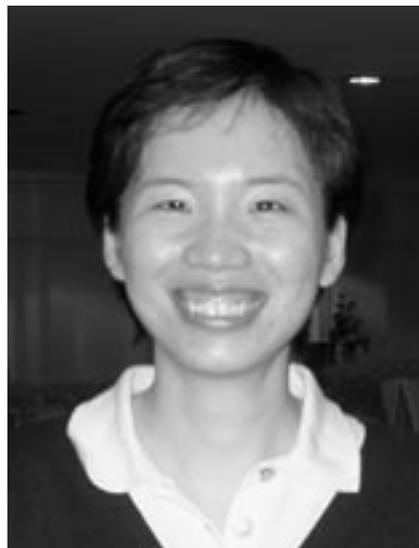
Manju Baroi is the principal of the YWCA Girl's High School in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She has been a member of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh for many years. She is a member of the Fellowship of Least Coin and an executive committee member of the Christian Health Care Project. She is married and has three children.

Francisco Maria de Vasconcelos

Francisco Maria de Vasconcelos is the moderator of the Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Sae (IPTL). He was the general secretary of the IPTL from 1996 to 2000. He is also the chairman of the Committee of Protestant Churches in East Timor. He was a parish minister from 1991 to 1996. He did his theological studies at Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



Prawate Khid-arn



Lu Yueh-Wen



Manju Baroi



Francisco Maria de Vasconcelos

Khamphone Kounthapanya

Khamphone Kounthapanya is the executive president of the Lao Evangelical Church. He lives in Vientiane. He has been involved with CCA for many years.



Khamphone Kounthapanya

- Rt Rev. Paul Shishir Sarker (Bangladesh)
- Rev. Eang Chhun (Cambodia)
- Ms Cynthia Man-Chi Hui (Hong Kong)
- Mrs Susan Jacob (India)
- Rev. Dr Henriette T. Hutabarat Lebang (Indonesia)
- Ms Jiyeob Kim (Japan)
- Ms Yoon Jae-Hyang (Korea)
- Mr Khamdeng Kounthapanya (Laos)
- Mr Anthony Row (Malaysia)
- Ms Kaythi Min Din (Myanmar)
- Dr Kali Bahadur Rokaya (Nepal)



Thomas Soo Yee Po

- Ms Shahzad Khuram (Pakistan)
- Ms Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes (Philippines)
- Rev. Dr P.J.T. Peiris (Sri Lanka)
- Rev. Samuel Lin Ying Chiu (Taiwan)
- Rev. Dr Pradit Takerangrangsarit (Thailand)
- Mr Ermudo Dossantos (Timor Loresa'e)

Treasurer

Bishop Thomas Soo was elected honorary treasurer. Thomas Soo Yee Po is the diocesan bishop of Western Kowloon, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church). Born in Hong Kong in 1941, he has been in church ministry for more than 25 years. He is a former chaplain and lecturer at Chung Chi College in Hong Kong and director of the Diocesan Counselling Service. He has been active in the areas of education, culture, counselling, social service, correctional service, theological education, pastoral education and chaplaincy. He is also the chairman of the Hong Kong Christian Council.

General Committee

A general committee, comprising 19 members, one from each country, was also elected by the assembly.

- Rev. Pamela Tankersley (Aotearoa New Zealand)
- Rev. Prof. James Haire (Australia)

Executive Committee

James Haire, Susan Jacob, Henriette T. Hutabarat Lebang, Anthony Row and Yoon Jae-Hyang are on the executive committee.



The new general committee is installed at the closing worship

Books launched

Important history of the ecumenical movement in Asia finally completed

The two volumes of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia* were launched during the CCA's twelfth general assembly in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

CCA president, Jennifer Dawson, unwrapped the volumes and they were distributed to the delegates. Ninan Koshy, author and editor respectively of the two volumes, spoke on the occasion.

The books have been written from an authentically Asian perspective and challenge several long-held assumptions in ecumenical and church history. Ninan affirms



Ninan Koshy, Wong Wai Ching, Geoff Alves, Sang Jung Park, Ron O'Grady, Somsri, Moon Kyu Kang, Ahn Jae Woong, Yip Kok Choong and Shin Seung Min



Ninan Koshy with the two volumes

that Christianity is an Asian religion, and the significant role played by Asian ecumenical consciousness for more than nine decades in broadening and widening the ecumenical vision is highlighted in the two volumes.

Representatives of the three organisations that sponsored the project, Ahn Jae Woong (CCA), Yip Kok Choong (Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs) and Shin Seung Min (World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region) were present during the short ceremony. Also present were the committee

members of the history book project, Moon Kyu Kang, Sang Jung Park, Ron O'Grady and Wong Wai Ching, and Geoff Alves, who copy edited and produced the book.

God Who Matters

God Who Matters, written by Ahn Jae Woong, was also released at the assembly. This book is a collection of ecumenical sermons and lectures delivered on different occasions during Ahn's tenure as general secretary of CCA. (See page 30.)

CCA to move to Chiang Mai

The twelfth general assembly of the CCA accepted the recommendation of a task force that the CCA office be relocated to Chiang Mai in Thailand. The move is to be effected within 18 months. Before this can happen the existing CCA property in Hong Kong will have to be sold at a best possible price so that, after establishing its office in Chiang Mai,

an additional fund of US\$1 million will be available, which most likely will be used as an endowment fund. One of the reasons for moving to Chiang Mai is the low administrative cost in Chiang Mai compared to Hong Kong. There will be large savings in salary costs. Moving to Chiang Mai would involve the CCA acquiring the status of a foundation so it could buy property in Thailand.

Assembly began and ended with worship



Opening worship at First Church, Chiang Mai

As Chiang Mai burnt under a hot afternoon sun, CCA assembly delegates and local Christians gathered and worshipped at a local church, marking the opening of the twelfth general assembly of CCA on 31 March. Some 500 delegates from different parts of Asia and outside converged on Chiang Mai to attend the six-day assembly.

A celebration of the ecumenical journey of people who have attended previous assemblies, beginning with Prapat in 1957 to Tomohon in 2000, was one of the highlights of the worship, held at First Church, Chiang Mai, of the Church of Christ in Thailand. After the four CCA presidents welcomed the delegates in their own language to the assembly, people exchanged greetings of peace.

The worship was interspersed with Thai traditional dances, songs and prayers. A Karen choir, directed by Garrett Intorn, sang an anthem. The sermon was given by the moderator of the Church of Christ in Thailand, Dr Boonratna Boayen. The assembly theme song, 'God of Asia, God of All', was

sung before the benediction and a blessing dance.

CCA general secretary Ahn Jae Woong, CCT president Boonratna Boayen, CCA president Anthony Row and CCT general secretary Sint Kimhachandra planted two trees as sym-

bols of shades of peace. The delegates were then treated to a sumptuous dinner and cultural presentation after which they returned to the venue of the assembly, the Lotus Hotel, for national meetings.

On Sunday, 3 April, the assembly participants worshipped at over 40 churches in and around Chiang Mai. Some of the participants preached at churches.

Sixteen leaders, representing different ecumenical organisations and agencies, brought greetings during the assembly.

Cultural presentations by traditional northern Thai dancers were held during a dinner and the opening and closing worships.

A cultural troupe, the National Group of Music and Dance, came from Korea to perform Korean traditional music and dance on 1 April.

The assembly closed with worship at the chapel of the Payap University on 5 April. Dr Kyaw Than, former general secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference, delivered the sermon.



Closing worship at Payap University

Speakers from other faiths

Spirituality and social activism go together

Worshipping God is fighting injustice, said Swami Agnivesh at a panel discussion on interfaith cooperation in Asia. Swami Agnivesh, a social, spiritual and human rights activist from India, said that spirituality is not just doing meditation or feeling good about oneself, but getting involved in social problems and issues. Spirituality and social activism are the two sides of the same coin, which should complement and supplement each other.

He told the assembly participants that religion is all about relationships, 'relationships with the creator and the creation'. A simple way to accept God was to accept truth and love, Swami said.

Swami Agnivesh was speaking at the CCA's twelfth general assembly's last D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture, which was designed as a question-and-answer session moderated by

an Old Testament scholar from Myanmar, Dr Anna May Chain.

Responding to a question about gender justice, Swami noted that as long as there was no equality between man and woman, there will be no communities of peace. He urged the participants to inculcate in children 'the three Ds—doubt, debate and dissent'.

Dr Asghar Ali Engineer, an Islamic scholar and social activist from India, in his answer to some questions, said that faith in religious values is the only way to build communities of peace for all. He felt that instead of faith in values, religious rituals are given importance and that seems to be one of the causes of increased violence and intolerance in our societies.

Dr Engineer expressed the view that various religious interests play an important role in causing violence. 'Clash of interest brings about religious violence.'

He stressed the importance for being answerable to our conscience, and practising what we preach, which he felt were important tasks in building peace in our societies. He was of the opinion that religion was not the problem, but 'power' was.

Citing an example of the term 'jihad' in the Koran, Engineer made it clear that it only meant 'efforts'. But, people with other interests have misinterpreted it to mean holy war. He expressed the view that most people worshipped God out of fear or greed and not out of love for the creator or creation, which is a manifestation of God.

Answering a question about the need for equality between man and woman, he said the patriarchal system served as a stumbling block to gender equality. The Koran stands for equality between man and woman. Theoretically there was nothing to stop a Muslim woman from becoming a priest in Islam.



Swami Agnivesh, Anna May Chain and Asghar Ali Engineer

Building communities of peace

Ahn Jae Woong calls for an ecumenical peace congress

Presenting his report to the general assembly, Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary, called for setting up an ecumenical peace congress (EPC) as a forum to explore possible ways of peace building in our times.

'The EPC could be an open forum to share each other's vision and hope to build communities of peace in our midst,' he told the assembly. It could be an autonomous body comprising ecumenical bodies to coordinate peace building efforts, he said.

Among the tasks he suggested for the EPC were policy development on peace building, strategy formulation for peace education and advocacy work, resource sharing for exchange of personnel and experts, information sharing or networking for peace mission and articulation of a theology of peace. According to Ahn, ecumenical organisations sometimes have constraints in expressing their views and comments on certain sensitive issues, and a forum such as EPC could express comments and responses based on people's aspirations on their behalf.

Earlier, explaining the three ecumenical mindsets as *veritas* (truth), *unitas* (unity) and *caritas* (love), Ahn said that the true God will help us to



Ahn Jae Woong greets Sam Kobia, WCC general secretary

know about the matter of faith and the matter of life, which should be the true way for all God's people.

Unity is an important religious value to promote peace, justice and equality as the basis for living together, he noted. Speaking on *caritas*, he said that it requires action. 'To extend Christian love, we need to engage in *caritas*.'

The ecumenical movement has a moral obligation to demonstrate Christian compassion to neighbours.

He urged the ecumenical movement to focus on the following areas.

- Witnessing the gospel to the whole world until such time that 'they may all be one'.
- Consistently emphasising God's mission for all God's people.
- Engaging fully in building just peace.
- Upholding the enhancement of human dignity and people's security.

DOV focus on Asia 2005 launched

Asian churches' efforts to overcome violence



Hansulrich Gerber, WCC DOV coordinator, presents the survival kit to Hope Antone, DOV Focus on Asia coordinator, and Joram Calimutan, DOV Focus on Asia intern

The World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) Asia Focus 2005 was formally launched during the twelfth general assembly. 'Asia will be the window for the rest of the world through which the eyes of the world will see how overcoming violence is being done by the churches in Asia,' he said.

'Asia will be in the limelight this year and the WCC will highlight the Asian stories to the world about how violence is being overcome in this region. While Asian churches are focused on overcoming violence, the world will focus on Asia,' Dr Kobia told the gathering.

Rev. Rothnanglliani Chhante, a 'living letter' from the DOV committee in the USA, read a letter addressed to the churches in Asia. The letter expressed the view that Asia, which has the potential to become economically prosperous in the near future, is also likely to see increasing disparities of health and wealth.

The letter concluded by saying, 'For the peace we seek is life in Christ, a dynamic life of wellbeing, reconciliation and healing even in the face of harsh and difficult circumstances.'

Speaking on the occasion, Rev. Hansulrich Gerber, WCC's DOV coordinator, said that the DOV called churches, ecumenical organisations and all people of goodwill to work together at local, regional and global levels with communities, secular movements and people of all living faiths for peace, justice and reconciliation. The DOV called on churches to repent for their complicity in violence, and to engage in theological reflections to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence, he told the assembly participants.

Addressing holistically the wide varieties of violence, both direct and structural, in homes, communities and international arenas, and learning from the local and regional analysis of violence and ways to overcome

The DOV is the fruit of the long and active involvement of the Asian churches and ecumenical movement in issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It challenges every church and ecumenical organisation to reaffirm their prophetic role on issues affecting the community. Thus the DOV Asia focus is seriously analysing the root causes of violence in the context of cultural diversity, economic marginalisation and political repression. It relies solely on the efforts of every local church and ecumenical organisation in Asia to overcome violence and build communities of peace for all. The DOV Asia Focus is using the CCA website to highlight the current situation in Asia and how Asian people continue their struggle and hope in the midst of violence and strife. The CCA-DOV committee is currently collecting songs, prayers, stories and liturgical resources that depict the struggle of Asian people to overcome violence. One of the highlights of the DOV Asia Focus is the parallel event during the WTO ministerial conference in December in Hong Kong.

The DOV Committee has no illusion that after the Asian focus and at the end of the decade violence will finally be overcome. Rather it will continue until genuine peace based on justice prevails in every community in Asia.

—Joram H. Calimutan

violence are some of the goals of the DOV, according to Gerber. He said that an estimated 1.6 million people lost their lives to violence in 2000.

Ms Ralphine Razak Manantenaso from Madagascar shared a message of peace with the assembly.

As a symbolic gesture, the WCC gave the CCA a 'survival kit', containing mainly DOV-related documents and publications, which was received by the DOV Focus on Asia coordinator, Hope Antone.

New members



Three new members were accepted by the assembly in Chiang Mai—the Nepal Christian Council, the Salvation Army Hong Kong and Macau Command and the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand. Here the CCA presidents and general secretary welcome representatives of the three new members. From left, CCA president Bishop Irenaeus (welcoming the new members), Rev. John Henderson, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia (who stood in for the Armenian church for the welcome), Major Dieu Quang On, Salvation Army Hong Kong and Macau Command, Dr K.B. Rokaya, general secretary of the Nepal Christian Council, presidents Anthony Row, Jennifer Dawson and Wong Wai Ching, and general secretary Ahn Jae Woong



When the Hong Kong and Macau Command of the Salvation Army joined CCA, Major On Dieu Quang represented his church. The major was born in Vietnam, which he left in 1978 on board a refugee boat. After a short time in a refugee camp in Thailand, he went to Australia. For some time he worked in the Toyota car factory in Melbourne, before finally answering the call to enter the ministry. He felt called to serve among Chinese, and for 18 years he has been in Hong Kong. He is now the Divisional Corps Growth and Development Officer. The army has 19 corps in Hong Kong and Macau. On Dieu Quang felt privileged and honoured to represent the army at this assembly, especially as a new member. He feels the Salvation Army can make a contribution to CCA in helping building communities of peace.

Pope mourned

The assembly was saddened to hear the news of the death of Pope John Paul II. Fr Tom Michel, representing the Federation of Asian Bishops' Councils, said the Pope had lived a long and good life and was ready to meet his Lord. Fr Michel said the Pope had made a big difference in the life not only of Catholics but also of other Christians and people around the world. John Paul II had put ecumenism at the centre of Catholic consciousness, making it a living thing in the faith and giving it an importance that could have been too easy to ignore. The Pope once stated, 'Our commitment to ecumenical unity is irreversible.'

Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the WCC, said the Pope emphasised the importance of dialogue in deepening the church's commitment to ecumenism. He called for healing memories and inter-Christian and interfaith prayer meetings on different occasions. 'We will continue to pray that the late John Paul II's legacy of commitment to ecumenism will renew our commitment to the search for visible unity.'

Thailand's Catholics mourned the Pope's death. Ten of the participants of the CCA assembly attended mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Chiang Mai, led by president Rev. Jennifer Dawson. A 1 m tall statue was placed in front of the pulpit and some people prayed at the statue before the mass. 'We are mourning of our Pope,' the Bishop of Chiang Mai, Joseph Sangvai Suasarang, said. The Bishop remembered that Pope John Paul II was a person who was active in humanitarian issues, such as anti-terrorism, war, divorce and abortion. Every Sunday, Sacred Heart has three masses in Thai and one in English. In his sermon at the English mass, Rev. Miguel Garaizabal, SJ, from La Coruna, Spain, told of his appreciation of John Paul II: 'He always taught about peace and forgiveness. For him, there was no future without forgiveness.'

There are 300,000 Catholics in Thailand, of whom 35,000 are in the north. The first Thai to be baptised as a Catholic was Bunlasai Nicholas Bunke Kitbamrung. Bunlasai was born in 1895 and died as a martyr in prison on 12 January 1944.

Thai PM visits CCA assembly

‘Building communities of peace for all’ a noble theme

CCA had the honour and privilege to have the Thai Prime Minister, Dr Thaksin Shinawatra, as the keynote speaker on building communities of peace for all in a multireligious context in Asia and the world.

First, Dr Thaksin, a Buddhist, expressed his government’s deepest condolences and grief on the passing of Pope John Paul II.

He also welcomed the assembly participants to his home, Chiang Mai, where he was born and grew up, saying, ‘As a proud graduate of Montfort College here in Chiang Mai, I am only too aware of the important role of Christian schools and universities in promoting Thailand’s educational system.’

The audience applauded as Dr Thaksin said, ‘In addition to myself, my wife and my children are also graduates from Christian schools in Thailand. One of the most important



things I discovered was that all religions have basically the same objectives in common, that is to teach their followers to do good deeds and to serve as worthy members of society.’

He pointed out that the ‘misinterpretation of religious teachings is a source of major concern in our world today’, referring to a book called *A History of God* by a Catholic nun, Karen Armstrong, that he read several years ago.

He commended the assembly theme, ‘Building Communities of Peace for All’ as ‘a most noble one’, adding that ‘peace is a highly important theme and goal’ for all religions.

‘The twin duties of “peace-making” and “peace-keeping” form an essential part of the Christian faith and life,’ he said, referring to the word of Jesus in Matthew 5:9, as well as the teachings of Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism on peace. ‘They are also indispensable elements in the teach-



ing and aspirations of all the major world religions.'

He noted the growth of terrorism and the negative impacts of globalisation. 'It is totally up to us whether we shall harness the positive elements of globalisation for our own benefit, or allow ourselves to be swept away by the negative tide of this phenomenon,' he said. 'We must be prepared to face the free flow of goods, services, people, technology, information and financial resources.'

He also emphasised the importance of trying to comprehend the root causes of radicalism, terrorism and random violence and dealing with any inherent sense of injustice.

His statement came just one day after at least two people were killed by three almost simultaneous bombings at Hat Yai International Airport, a department store and a hotel in southern Thailand, which he reportedly criticised.

While he mentioned that 'there is actually nothing wrong with "radicalism" in itself', as, he noted, so-called 'radicals' have been the main proponents of progress in science, technology, philosophy and creativity, along with Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha, whose ideas were far ahead of their era, he contrasted this with the narrow brand of ideology emerging from injustice and leading to violent radicalism.

He added that we must comprehend the global phenomenon of a new strain of radical militancy often arising from a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of religious principles and 'not create further opportunities for the expansion of such militancy from our own ignorance or neglect'.

'It is only through such means can we hope to achieve the goal of this conference in building communities of peace for all,' he said.

In conclusion, the prime minister expressed his strong belief that 'if peoples from different religions and cultural backgrounds and traditions can meet together to discuss their differences as well as similarities, the end result will be the emergence of a peaceful and harmonious society,' commending Payap University and its Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture for its involvement in promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding.

Geopolitics in Asia

Issues, dynamics and trends

The third speaker for the D.T. Niles Lectures, Dr Christine Loh, the founder and CEO of Civic Exchange, a Hong Kong-based non-profit thinktank, shared with the assembly audience a broad range of issues, dynamics and trends of geopolitics in the context of Asia and the world.

To exchange ideas with the audience, she mapped out some 'key drivers' and scenarios of geopolitics in Asia without reading from her prepared text, by referring to China and India in comparison, the 26 December tsunami last year to see the current capacity in Asia, and some ideas on leadership in the region and the world.

Dr Loh identified five key drivers, including demographics, natural resources and the environment, science and technology, the global economy and globalisation, national and international governments and future conflicts, as well as human development in education, sex balance and diseases such as SARS.

According to Dr Loh, one of the focal points in some of the studies on SARS is in the wild animal markets in Guangzhou, where animals are taken out and shipped from forests in Burma for Chinese food. Chinese male workers log there and traffic female sex workers for them. 'They are some of the problems that governments, churches and NGOs were trying to deal with,' she said, but they are 'not easy'.

'Aceh rebels will actually finally start some kind of dialogue with the Indonesian government. Maybe they are not going to ask for independence any more. It will be some kind of autonomy,' said Dr Loh, taking the examples of the tsunami in Aceh and Thailand. 'What happened in Thailand is the decisiveness of the government to deal with the devastated areas, including the quick action of helping foreigners who were tourists here to leave for the hospitals and so on.

'So, how well do governments do at the moment of crisis? They often crystallise what people think of the leaders,' she asked, referring to the example of the former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani after 9/11.

In reference to the tsunami, she analysed the capacities of the governments of the United States, China, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as the accountability of international and local NGOs.

'What became clear was that they were pretty much the only superpowers who moved in their ships and the American soldiers were on the ground dealing with relief work and helping the areas that were devastated,' she pointed out on the Chinese and US reactions to the tsunami. 'In Asia, you see American soldiers on the ground in a Muslim country in Indonesia helping with relief work. In the other side of the world in the Middle East, you have American soldiers in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Two very different stories. Now the cynical will say, 'Of course, what the Americans want to do is to show this other face of American power.' But in reality, there was nobody else who could move in those kind of resources into the region that quickly. As far as China is concerned, where is China's capacity today? It was in some ways China as a small coming-out party because what it did was that it wanted to be a part of this,' she went on to say. 'Now, China had actually suffered quite badly internationally over SARS for not grasping quickly enough and acknowledging quickly enough what was happening in China. So, I think you can see there is a new leadership in China who is much more sensitive about these issues.

'Will this actually spur the Chinese to develop the Chinese navy sooner or later?' she asked, in an attempt to see if China will follow suit the United States in some way. 'Are they going to therefore keep the peace that the US navy was doing after the tsunami? What may the Chinese navy do?



What will it train its navy to do?’

She mentioned Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore as the three rich areas in Asia. ‘Japan is still dealing with the issue in terms of what kind of military presence it is going to develop and what role it is going to play. It pledged significant amount of money to tsunami victims.

‘In Hong Kong, collectively, it is not the government. The people collected nineteen million US dollars to give to various NGOs,’ she added. ‘And I think on a per-capita basis, we are told, in Hong Kong we donated more private money than anybody else.

‘Singaporeans also donated significantly. What is different from Hong Kong is that it is a nation. It has its own armed forces,’ she went on to say. ‘Look what the Singapore army did. It did go into its neighbouring areas. It did help with relief work. And it did win finance in the region.

‘In terms of countries investing heavily in military resources, apart from fighting wars, is the tsunami giving us all a new sense of what else it can do?’ she asked. She indicated the positive aspect of the tsunami and

globalisation with regard to human solidarity through international and local NGOs, while asking a question of their accountability. ‘Not only have the people in Asia donated a lot of money [but also] people from all around the world. And what’s interesting about globalisation is how easy now it is for somebody in Norway, Sweden, the US, South America, by using the Internet and their credit cards, to actually donate money immediately. So, the tsunami has also become an example of how society today can show solidarity. What about accountability?’

‘I also see this as potentially a new opportunity,’ she added. ‘And perhaps this is an area where all of you can have some direct impact, because you are with churches and many community organisations. And I am sure that many of you are with organisations that have been part of collecting money and helping with tsunami relief in some ways. How can we use this opportunity to increase and improve the accountability that civil society and NGOs can bring?’

She concluded her speech by mentioning the future of leadership and the role of

the churches in the ‘them-and-us’ divide around the world, raising a question of our possibilities to create circumstances to ‘be on the same side’ and ‘at least try to understand more deeply, more fully, and more comprehensively how the other looks at the world, their hopes and their fears,’ adding that demagoguery is ‘a fear we all have’ that ‘led people down the hill’. And to make sure that we minimise that arising, she made a number of proposals, including:

- Each of us has a responsibility to know what is happening in some corner of our own country or another country. Today, there is no excuse that we can’t find out.
- We must demand of our political leaders that not only must they ignore these issues but also we must expect of them that they are going to be taking much more active enquiry as to why there are problems.

We expect of our leaders that they are going to think more integrally and more systematically to try to understand these problems.

- And after we understand these problems, what are some of the ways, tools and methods to solve the problems?

‘It might take a long time, but I do think we can’t get away from the very fundamental human experience of resolving problems through talking each other. I think the process we take to try to find solutions and communicate with others must come from the very deep core of values, principles and beliefs,’ she said. ‘This is where I think the churches play an extraordinarily important role all around the world to help to remind us of what core values are.’

Questions were raised by the audience regarding the target of our resistance to the US that is seeing China as a regional threat, the place of Australia in the geopolitics in Asia and a positive aspect of the tsunami. ‘Thank you, tsunami,’ said one from India, ‘because it helped India to meet and get support from so many people around the world.’

Youth on fire

Youth forum seeks solutions to young people's concerns

What could happen if more than 45 energetic young people from Asia gathered at one forum? That was realised in the Pa Sak Noi Room at the Lotus Hotel, Chiang Mai, 25–29 March. Youth delegates and stewards sat together, discussed and shook hands to represent the voice of Asian youth. They came from 14 countries, from Aotearoa New Zealand to Korea, from Sri Lanka to Fiji (right).

Activities included Bible studies, a cultural night, and discussions on the final youth statement to be brought to the assembly. At an Asian perspective on the general assembly, Lesley Capus, NCC Philippines' Youth Secretary, described 'economic globalisation'—trade liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation—as a pitiful and failed economic paradigm for Asia. 'For youth, its impact is overwhelming. Unemployment



among youth in the region is at an all time high,' he said.

Sunny Manohar, one of the youth delegates from India, told why he had come to the assembly. 'My special reason to be here is to voice Asian youth problems. We have to find better solutions.' These problems include terrorism, HIV/AIDS and political imbalance.

The youth meeting closed with a cultural night and feast with great performances from each country (pictured at left).

The long journey

Women to 'collectively transgress'

Fifty-four ecumenical participants to the pre-assembly Women's Forum on 27–30 March at the Holiday Garden Hotel in Chiang Mai vowed to 'collectively transgress' the hegemonic system that stands as an obstacle to building communities of peace for all in Asia, especially for women and children. It will be suicide if the women do not act now, according to the message that the participants presented to the CCA assembly.

The women shared with each other their stories of struggle for life in the midst of violence and death. Based on these realities, through creative art forms they envisioned communities of peace founded on justice, love and freedom.

The women then named and reflected on the urgent issues gravely affecting people, especially the majority who are poor women and children. They also identified their significant role and contribution in the journey towards achieving communities of peace their own contexts. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, in her keynote address, told



the women that in the current context of 'homogenisation and hegemony, which are all about control, restriction and incarceration' it is an urgent imperative for women to act

now. 'Collective transgression will require of us solidarity and resistance,' she said.

The forum opened with an Easter sunrise worship with the Karen Baptist Community in Chiang Mai. Mornings featured animated worship experiences and Bible reflections. Viola Raheb from Palestine, a DOV Reference Group member, lead one Bible reflection on the story of Cain and Abel with the Palestinian conflict situation as backdrop.

'As human beings created in God's image, we are called as keepers of our brothers, sisters and the environment,' Viola exhorted the women.

An orientation to the CCA assembly helped familiarise the women, especially the twelve delegates present, on the CCA assembly processes. A cultural solidarity fellowship of dances and songs and a closing ritual capped the forum.

The journey may be long and the struggle protracted. But, as God's empowered people, the women committed themselves to build communities of peace for all.



Interdependence

Differently abled workshop

About 25 participants took part in a pre-assembly workshop on disability issues, organised by the Christian Conference of Asia at Crystal Spring House, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 26 to 29 March. The theme of the conference was 'Weaving the Web of Interdependency of Disabled People for Eco-Justice and Peace in an Age of Information Technology'. The major achievement of the workshop was the fact that it was able to come up with a paradigm shift vis-à-vis disability issues. From 'dependency versus independence' approach, those present were able to move beyond and articulate a new model of 'interdependence', which provides an integral ecological perspective to address disability issues. The new paradigm and the theme of the conference were introduced by Lee Hong Jung, who organised the workshop on behalf of CCA, and other presentations dealt with various issues concerning disability from an eco-justice perspective of interdependence. Particularly important were those inputs that dealt with the issue of disability vis-à-vis the context of globalisation, information technology and the growing ecological crisis. Participants shared their own stories and their respective contextual concerns



relating to disability. Another highlight of the workshop was the time spent together in worship and Bible studies. These were done in such a manner that they were directly related to the issues of disability. The workshop also formulated a communiqué, which contained specific recommendations and action plans for CCA, member churches and national councils in the region. The participants also had an opportunity to do some field visits and excursions. All this helped them to develop a sense of solidarity and oneness among them as individuals and the churches and the organisations that they represented. The workshop provided a new sense of confidence and direction to the participants for which they are profoundly grateful to CCA.

—George Mathew Nalunnakkal

People's Forum

Speaking for the marginalised and the oppressed

CCA-FMU held a People's Forum for the URM activists of the region in the historic city of Chiang Mai on 25–29 March.

Participants came from Australia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The forum began with a worship service and the welcoming address was delivered by Josef Widyatmadja, secretary of CCA URM.

The areas of focus in the forum were geopolitics and religion in Asia and hearing the voice of the marginalised, labourers and migrant workers.

The adverse impact of economic globalisation was discussed at length. Various resource personnel presented their papers and there was active participation from the floor.



Small groups and workshops gave an opportunity to present findings and observations on the social, political and human lives of the people in the region. People were to critically analyse and reflect on the struggles, sufferings and pain of Asian people in their own context.

A few members from the delegation read papers on challenges to the URM and its tasks and the future prospects of Asia URM. Issues included religious harmony in Indonesia, discriminated groups such as the Dalits in India and Aborigines in Australia, undocumented children, trafficking, violence and political unrest and instability.

Space was provided for delegates to look at the activities of URM and review its objectives and strategies to achieve communities of peace for all. However, it was also felt that challenges for URM are increasing. URM needs the solidarity of the CCA and the WCC in order to make a global impact on the pain and suffering of the marginalised and oppressed groups on Asian soil.

Feminist theology

Dispelling myths about women and feminism

I had a wonderful opportunity of participating as resource person and workshop facilitator in the Feminist Theology Conference organised by the Association for Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM) at Lisu Theological Seminary in Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar, on 22–26 May. My input was a general introduction to Asian feminist theologies, while the workshop I facilitated was on spirituality and sexuality.

Perhaps one of the good things about the conference, attended by 70 participants, 15 of whom were men, was the openness that many of the participants demonstrated in sharing myths they have held about women, sexuality and feminist theology as a whole.

A theologically trained woman shared how her own mother had told her that it would be unthinkable for her to receive a blessing/benediction from her own daughter—thereby showing how women themselves cannot see women ordained into the

ministry. Very few denominations ordain women in Myanmar, and those qualified for ordination are, according to the women participants, those who are single and old. In view of such comments, I felt the need for education on the meaning of ordination as well as the leadership of women and men.

A male participant shared that a medical doctor had told him that the reason why women have faster pulse beats is because they are short-tempered. He therefore concluded that it is better to prevent women who are prone to be short-tempered from getting ordained. As facilitator of the workshop where this was raised, I had to say that being short-tempered and hot-tempered is not gender specific and what the doctor said is part of the gender stereotyping that has always put women down or in a negative light. In fact, there are men who are short- and chilli-tempered but they have not been barred from positions of leadership.

Another male participant said that since women are already biased, the best teachers of feminist theology are men who are free from any biases. I had to say that if even God is not free from bias for the oppressed and marginalised, men are not free from their own biases either. It would in fact be dangerous if feminist theology is taught by men who are against the goals of feminism, i.e. gender justice and empowerment of women.

Such an openness to share myths and biases could be the beginning of genuine gender justice in Myanmar. The conference was attended by teachers of feminist theology from 35 member institutions of ATEM and some representatives from the Catholic Church and evangelical churches in Myanmar.

Anna May Say Pa, principal of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, facilitated three creative and participatory Bible studies. Elizabeth Tapia, on the faculty at Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Geneva, gave an input on women in mission and facilitated a workshop on the World Mission Conference. Limatula Longkumer, instructor from Jorhat Theological Seminary in Northeast India, gave an input on feminist pedagogy and facilitated a workshop on Asian feminist theology. Other workshops were facilitated by Myanmar resource persons, Mary Dun and Soe Soe Mar on feminist theology curriculum, Eh Tar Gay on feminist hermeneutics, May May Phyone on women and development, Thit Thit Myat San on women and culture, Lily Kadoe on women and religions and Khin Swe Oo on women and church.

Five Thai women participated in the conference with the hope that a similar conference can be held in Thailand in the near future. CCA-FMU is committed to supporting such initiatives in order to dispel myths about women and feminism as well as to enrich theological education in Asia.

—Hope S. Antone



One of the small discussion groups that were a regular feature at the conference

Peace in Northeast Asia

Formation of a people's life-peace community in Northeast Asia

The Korean Christian Faculty Fellowship (KCFF), standing within the historical tradition of the Donghak Movement and the resolute struggle against the powers of Japanese colonialism, carried the spirit of resistance and solidarity by joining the minjung movement that took place during the period of industrialisation in the Republic of Korea (ROK) during the late twentieth century. The KCFF has also been a strong force of resistance against the totalitarian anti-communist military dictators, struggling with the Korean people to attain democracy and working toward the peaceful reunification of Korea.

It has endeavored to lay the foundation for peace on the Korean peninsula and open the path to national unification by engaging in various movements to establish peace and attain national unification.

Within this historical tradition and praxis participants from China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Norway, Russia, South Africa, the Philippines, Taiwan and the United States gathered at the St Lazarus Village in Uiwang City, Gyonggido, Korea, from 15 to 19 May 2005 to hold an 'International Conference on Peace for Life in Northeast Asia' to discuss ways by which peace for life could be established in the area.

As the participants exchanged stories of the suffering people and their struggles in solidarity with the oppressed and victimised, as they delved into the theological, political, social and ethical issues surrounding the region, they discovered ever more clearly that they were engaged in a struggle of those promoting life and peace on the one hand and those profiteering from death and violence on the other. The three days spent together in common worship and the sharing of stories, ideas and visions of hope produced a renewed commitment to solidarity and action for building a peace for life in Northeast Asia. As part of a continued commitment to each

other in solidarity and for the purpose of promoting common action, the participants made some observations and recommendations:

- We believe that peace is an integral element of life. There can be no peace without justice, and there can be no life without peace.
- The global situation today is one in which people find themselves increasingly victimised by the imperial acts of aggression instigated by the United States in its pursuit of the so-called 'War on Terror'.
- Globalisation endangers the right of people to live peacefully.
- As the Empire seeks to aggressively broaden its influence in the world the peoples of Asia have become the victims of more sophisticated forms of violence and are denied their basic rights as human beings to live in peace.
- The Korean peninsula is faced with a situation that may turn to a crisis at any moment.
- It is imperative that United States end its antagonistic policy toward the DPRK.
- We are deeply concerned of the notions of preemptive strike advanced by the United States.
- We elucidate the principle that all nuclear weapons in the world should be comprehensively regulated, dismantled and destroyed.
- The designation of the DPRK as an 'outpost of tyranny' by the United States, along with the statement made in 2002 that named the DPRK as an 'axis of evil' is a direct denial of the DPRK's right as a state to exist.
- We believe that DPRK and the ROK should move forward together on a path of peaceful co-existence, peaceful exchange and peaceful reunification
- We deplore the fact that the history of colonial exploitation and rule conducted by

the Japanese in this region has not been sufficiently redressed.

- The recent escalation of issues relating to land that occurred as a result of Japan's assertion of possession regarding Dokdo Island and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea have become a seed for conflict.
- We call upon Japan to participate in constructively dealing with its issues of the historical past.
- We highly regard the efforts of the South Korean government to strengthen its role as the catalyst and or balancer for peace in Northeast Asia.
- The peaceful exchange and cooperation of the DPRK and ROK, especially economic cooperative programs, are positive starting points.
- We firmly advocate and support the formation of a peace community that can secure the peace and security of the people at the both the local and global levels by their participation and leadership.
- We support the formation of civil peace forces within and among the countries in Northeast Asia.
- We recommend that the WCC, AACC, CCA and CLAI, as well as other ecumenical organisations, should take as a high priority the issue of global insecurity and violence resulting from the current world military order dominated by the global Empire, and advocate peace for all living beings on earth.
- In order for us to carry the spirit of the conference forward we recommend that the KCFF, in cooperation and solidarity with other peace building organisations, work toward a People's Peace Forum to be organised at the local, national and international levels for the purpose of engaging in periodic and regular activities for the purpose of building peace for life.

Communicating for peace and life

Christian communicators urged to highlight the plight of migrant workers

An assembly of Asia Region-World Association of Christian Communications (AR-WACC) has urged the Christian communicators in the region to highlight the importance of initiating interreligious dialogues and relations at different levels for building a society based on peace and harmony. The 19–22 April assembly on ‘Communicating for Peace and Life’ held in Seoul, Korea, acknowledged that interreligious relations will lead to improved relationships between individuals, groups and communities.

‘To achieve this, we must have an open mind and a willingness to listen and to understand other religions, their traditions and values,’ the assembly participants in the Seoul declaration said.

Expressing concern over the negative impact of globalisation which has created severe social and economic disparities between people in many Asian countries, the Seoul declaration noted that ‘community values have been eroded under the impact of globalisation which continues to thrust consumerism upon communities’.

Delivering the keynote address at the assembly, Dr Kim Yong Bock, renowned Minjung theologian and chancellor of the Advanced Institute for the Study of Life, said that the ‘cultural market and the consumerist drive of the global market penetrate deeply into the heart, mind and soul of the people and their communities’. He said global communication media have created artificial sense experiences, which distort perceptions and dissipate the vital spirit of life.

The 41 participants, who came from Thailand, India, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Myanmar, felt that natural disasters such as tsunamis and

earthquakes are subjects for communication for life and therefore there is a need for focusing on natural disaster information management that would enable many countries in Asia to network among themselves to help each other and to receive early warnings.

The Seoul declaration expressed concern over the increasing poverty and unemployment in many Asian countries due to ‘oppressive economic policies’, which has resulted in forcing a large number of people to leave their countries to work outside so that they and their families can survive. The declaration called on Christian communicators to highlight the harassment and humiliation these migrant workers face and bring them to the notice of the respective governments for remedial measures.

The participants recommended that AR-WACC organise a consultation on this to inform and educate Christian communicators, journalists who work in Christian media and church leaders of the sending and receiving countries in Asia.

They also urged the Christian communicators to highlight the issue of HIV/AIDS as a priority for churches and media through available communication channels and AR-WACC forums and said that ‘education and prevention have proven the most effective weapons to combat HIV/AIDS at this time’.

The declaration expressed concern over the delay in the unification of Korea. ‘We truly desire unification of North and South Korea, which should be done by communicating through peaceful means, and with our whole heart and soul.’

The participants pledged to raise their voice in support and act as catalysts and facilitators for peace and justice in the twenty-first century.

They recommended AR-WACC extend an invitation to Christian communicators in North Korea for all its major events in the future and to open the WACC membership to North Korean Christians.

The assembly began with an opening worship led by members of the Korean Association of Women Theologians.

Dr Sebastain Periannan (India), Dr Noh Jong-Sun (Korea), Dr Kang Nam-Soon (Korea), Prof. Leea Rao (India) and Ms Maria Theresa Nera-Lauron (Philippines) presented papers during the assembly.

Among those who attended the Assembly was the Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Social Communication Executive Secretary, Father Franz-Josef Ailers.

The participants also heard reports by WACC Asia regional coordinator David Lin (London), AR-WACC chairperson Ms Eleanor M. Gonzales (Philippines), AR-WACC Secretary Rev. John Joshva Raja (India) and AR-WACC treasurer Mr Erik Lai.

The Seoul assembly elected new office bearers. Dr John Henry Anand (India) was elected the president of AR-WACC.

Rev. Judy Chan (Hong Kong) is the vice-president, Ms Maria Theresa Lauron (Philippines) has been elected the secretary and Rev. Cheon Young-Cheol (Korea) was elected the treasurer.

The London-based WACC is an ecumenical organisation that promotes cooperation between Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic communicators. WACC, which also promotes cooperation between people of other faiths and ideologies, is made up of 850 corporate and personnel members in fifteen countries. CCA is a corporate member of WACC.

—Philip Mathew

‘The Spirit of Bandung’

Towards a common future

A three-day conference, ‘The Spirit of Bandung 2005: Towards a Common Future’, was held in Jakarta on 12–14 April, organised by the Christian Conference of Asia–Urban Rural Mission in collaboration with the Interna-

tional Forum on Indonesia Development, the Christian NGOs Network, the Centre for Community Development of NU (a Muslim organisation), the Community Development Society, the Institute of Global Justice, the Indonesia Conference on Religion and Peace,

the Catholic Council in Indonesia, the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, the Indonesia Christian Church, YMCA Metro, and the Prison Service Working Group. At the end of the conference they issued the following declaration.

Declaration of the Asia-Africa Forum 2005

It is with a deep sense of interfaith cooperation that we, people of faith communities and peoples’ movements from Asia, Africa and other continents came together to Jakarta at the Asia-Africa Forum 2005 to share our common vision on ‘The Spirit of Bandung’ in conjunction with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Asia-Africa Confer-

ence that was held in Bandung 18–25 April 1955. We assert that ‘The Spirit of Bandung’ is the spirit of oppressed people for a new world that is free from exploitation and colonialism, a world of peace and international justice. We recalled the series of meetings aimed to revisit ‘The Spirit of Bandung’ that were held in June 2002 in Bandung, fol-

lowed by another conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in August 2003 and in Mumbai, India, during the World Social Forum in January 2004. The present world is going through rapid changes. The most recent development is the expansion of neoliberalism under the banner of globalisation usurped by the Empire. As a result, countries and peoples of



Asia-Africa are being victimised again even more seriously by transnational capital, aided by global financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO and client states.

We are determined to reclaim 'The Spirit of Bandung', which by itself represents the spirit of liberation, the spirit of justice and the spirit of peace. 'The Spirit of Bandung' is also a spirit of solidarity and trust in the struggle for a just world, for equality, for a common prosperity, for a global life in peace and harmony. Hence, 'The Spirit of Bandung' needs to be reasserted to be operational in the present globalised world. We are determined to promote interfaith cooperation, strengthen networks among peoples' organisations and all movements working towards social transformation. We emphasise the need for an alternative spirituality grounded in human dignity, in the dignity of creation and hope for the future and based on the daily struggle of marginalised communities and victims of oppressive structures.

We are of the opinion that the countries that attended the Bandung conference of 1955 have turned their backs to its original goals. In today's world dominated by neoliberalism and by terror and counterterror, we

reflected on 'The Spirit of Bandung', which is the spirit of resistance to capitalist globalisation as the new form of colonialism. It is the spirit of common future and the spirit of alternatives in the face of cultural, economic and political absolutism.

Concerns

We are concerned about the economic, political and cultural exploitation by neoliberalism, and of the abuse of religion in exacerbating the situation of conflict and in justifying the domination of power against the people.

We are concerned about the abuse of religion to further narrow political interests instead of a genuine spirituality that promotes justice, peace and reconciliation.

We note with grave concern that the 'War on Terror' has been transformed as an ideology to divide communities and to demonise a few, while it provides justification for the return of such jungle laws as pre-emptive strikes as normative political strategies. The conference participants uphold the sanctity of life as an organising principle of the people and declare that the attempt to promote violence as redemptive is a challenge to the

basic notion of civilisation. It is unfortunate that unilateral decisions are made by the powerful nations to bypass the common consensus of the global community, expressed through the forums of the United Nations. Moreover, certain nation states use war on terror as an excuse to curb civil and social liberties of the people.

We warn against the subsumption of life to the logic of the market and emphasise the need to develop alternative means of measuring human worth that reflect the innate dignity of humanity and all creation.

At the time when economic globalisation alienates the majority of people from the common resources, we advocate that the fundamental rights of people to establish social agencies for the management of resources should be espoused and upheld. While doing so, the perceived priority of indigenous people, women and other marginalised groups to ownership of national resources should be ensured. This can be achieved by encouraging people's participation in national, regional and international decision making when it relates to the wellbeing of the people, enabling them to become stakeholders of their own destiny.

Recommendations

- Strengthen solidarity and trust among the peoples of Asia, Africa and other continents as well, and sustain the awareness of 'The Spirit of Bandung' through education, training and common action.
- Strengthen people-centred politics and economics that affirm 'The Spirit of Bandung'.
- Promote mutual exchange of information and personnel between and among Asian and African peoples, and peoples of other continents as well.
- Encourage the countries that participated in the first Bandung Conference of 1955 to reaffirm and recommit to 'The Spirit of Bandung', to promote interstate cooperation alongside the global solidarity of people movements.
- Call for genuine democratisation of nation states so that they listen to the voices of the people in claiming their struggle for justice and peace.
- Call for the genuine democratisation of the United Nations Organisation as well as other international organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO so that they listen to the voices of the people in claiming their struggle for justice and peace.
- In 'The Spirit of Bandung', we support all initiatives for peace and reconciliation in and among particular countries in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world.
- We particularly call nation states and peoples' movements to consolidate their power to uphold the rights of farmers and peasants in the upcoming Ministerial Meeting of the WTO on Agriculture and Trade Agreement in Hong Kong in December 2005.
- We strongly recommend that the organisers of the forthcoming Asia-Africa Summit allow the representatives of NGOs and people's movements to represent the concerns and hopes of marginalised people in the conference.
- It is worth repeating the declaration of the late Indonesian President Soekarno at the opening of the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung of 1955 that 'we can inject the voice of reason into world affairs. We can mobilise all the spiritual, all the moral, all the political strength of Asia and Africa on the side of peace. We can demonstrate to the minority of the world with lives on the other continents that we, the majority, are for peace, not for war, and that whatever strength we have will always be thrown on to the side of peace.'

DOV is for the people

The significance of the Decade to Overcome Violence for Asia

In a far away place in the province of Tarlac there is a church located in the midst of the community. The people there faithfully go to church every Sunday and during special occasions and activities. In short, the people are very religious—they follow the Ten Commandments and other dogmas of the church. One Sunday morning, while the community was busy worshipping, in the house beside the church a child was crying for help. A stranger was raping her together with her mother. She cried for help but no-one among the worshipping believers listened or gave a hand. The mother and child mourned in their lonesome house. The following week, the church was looted and the bread and the wine spread out on the floor. The priest shouted angrily saying that the thief desecrated the body of Christ (Corpus Domini), hence, the person must be punished and sent to hell. Because of what happened the whole community mourned and prayed earnestly.

Violence and the church

Violence in all forms is detrimental to people's lives. It affects not only the physical wellbeing of a person but also their psychosocial and spiritual aspects. But perhaps the greatest violence that a victim could experience is the 'denial' and ignorance of the violence, which prohibits them from doing something to reclaim their dignity as created in the image of God. The church is not exempt from this tendency—in fact, it even perpetuates it.

Historically, the church as community of believers has been perpetuating the culture of denial and ignorance of the existence of violence, both within and outside the church. One has only to recall the participation of the church in the crusades against Muslims during the medieval period. The church was in connivance with the state in perpetuating violence at the expense of peasants, women,

children, youth and knights who were made to fight against Muslims. As Pablo Richard said, the church as an instrument of the state covered its actions and decisions in the name of God when in reality it is nothing but for power, wealth and territory.

Nowadays, Asian churches are facing the same dilemma. Many churches and church people at present are still under the culture of denial, ignorance and neutrality. For many churches in Asia it is not the business of the church to act and criticise the exploitative political and economic order of a given community or nation. Many churches take a hands-off position on issues that degrade humanity. Those who believe and practise neutrality on issues affecting the community fail to understand and distinguish between the oppressor and oppressed, the exploiter and exploited, the rich and poor, evil and good, unjust and just, and subsequently fail to locate the church's mission. In a world of so much strife, violence and suffering, there is no such thing as being neutral. In order to follow Christ and serve the people, Christian believers must take sides—just as Jesus the Christ opted to take sides with the poor and marginalised.

Churches overcoming violence

The Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) was initiated by the World Council of Churches as a parallel campaign to the United Nations' declaration of 2001–2010 as a 'Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World'. For each year of the decade the WCC decides on a focus and 2005 is the DOV Focus on Asia.

Part of the DOV campaign led by the Christian Conference of Asia is a call to end the culture of denial and neutrality among Asian churches and ecumenical organisations, and to reaffirm Asian churches' role as active participants in the struggles of Asian people for justice and peace. In fact

the ecumenical movement blossomed in the midst of peoples' struggle for justice and peace. Therefore, Asian churches today can take inspiration from early Asian ecumenical leaders and martyrs whose commitment to serve God and the suffering people serves as a model of faithfulness to God through the ministry of Jesus Christ, even to the point of carrying a cross. In Asia, the DOV campaign is not so much a new thing as a reminder of a rich history of churches' active engagement in issues of peace and justice.

Perspective of the DOV Asia Focus

Asia is diverse in terms of the religiopolitical and socioeconomic life of the people. In Asia you can find different kinds of faiths and religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and others, that affect the life and cultures of the people in a certain community. Socioeconomically there are extremes. Two of the richest and powerful nations in the world are found in the region, Japan and Australia, not to mention the booming economy of China. But impoverished nations are there too, e.g. Bangladesh and the Philippines.

Taking lessons from the concrete picture of Asia and the historical involvement of the Asian ecumenical movement, DOV is for the people of Asia. The theme 'people' had been developed within CCA with serious social analysis and theological reflection. Already at the Bangkok Assembly (1964) there was a clear recognition of the role of the people understood as *laos* or the people as victims of tyranny, oppression and poverty. The ecumenical perspective on people was broadened. This was further developed through consultations and assemblies and reached a new stage in the Penang Assembly (1977). It was the impact of people as *ochlos*, the multitudes, the teeming masses of Asia, that became prominent in the understanding of

CCA. The *ochlos* here is understood as the urgency of the times to liberate the people from yokes of slavery and oppression that undermine their being. The challenge before CCA and the churches was to give a genuine Christian response to this Asian reality.

In this era of globalisation and amidst the systemic or structural violence that causes suffering and discontent, the DOV takes seriously the meaning of people as the subject of history. A new history is being written in our time. No longer are the victories and

exploits of the powerful the central points for an understanding of history. Now the deep movements of the human spirit and growing solidarity of the people are reference points for a perception of history. Hence, the task of DOV is to create conditions that will support the interests of humankind, for we believe that living in Christ with people means having to take sides with those who are victims of oppression and being in solidarity with them in reclaiming their dignity as created in the image of God.

During this observance of DOV, we must heed the warning of prophet Amos (5:22–24): ‘Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.’ Otherwise, the DOV Focus on Asia will simply have a great name but lack the tenacity and perspective of Christ in doing mission. —*Joram H. Calimutan*

Communicating the message

The tsunami and the church’s response

Christian communicators in Asia have urged the church to make efforts to make stories of their involvement with the communities into the media and to get the media interested in their work. In a message issued at the end of a consultation on ‘Tsunami: A Challenge to Christian Communication’, they said that the response of the churches to the tsunami tragedy has not been adequately reflected in the secular media. ‘In fact, we feel that the poor media coverage of the church’s response to the tsunami is a wake-up call to the church in Asia to facilitate and inculcate a more interactive environment of communication within the church and with the mainstream media, both local and international,’ the 42 participants who attended the consultation said.

The 18–22 May consultation in Bangkok organised among others by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Social Communication discussed mainly the preparedness of the church for crises such as the tsunami and how capable and confident it is in communicating its position during such a crisis to the church and the secular and commercial media.

The consultation felt that there was a need for increased interaction between the church and mainstream media. The need to create a pool of church communications

professionals through intensive short-term training programs to impart skills in media liaison and interaction, running media offices and basic IT skills was stressed at the consultation. The need for accelerating the introduction of a communications culture in the Asian church was also emphasised.

The consultation stated that even though media interest in the church in Asia continues to be high, the church is not able to respond to this interest professionally by articulating the message and position of the church on issues of wider interest.

Executive Secretary of FABC-OSC, Fr Franz-Josef Ailers, who spoke at the consultation, regretted the lack of proper academic formation in communications in the church. Speaking at the consultation, executive editor of the Union of Catholic Asian News, Fr Robert Astorino said, ‘The church needs to engage specialists who are qualified to discuss and evaluate media so as to help the church properly assess the real potential and real needs of every church enterprise. Reasonable assessments must be determined before continuing current operations or launching new ones.’ He called on the church to engage professionally competent media personnel and added that the full-time church workers who are doing media work must be properly trained and salaried.

UCA News produced 135 news reports from the time tsunami struck on 26 December until the end of April 2005. ‘The last fifteen years have seen an enormous change in the mindset of people across Asia. Satellite transmission of news and information, along with rapid introduction of mobile telecom technologies, is creating a rapid flow of information and knowledge at extremely low costs,’ the message noted. ‘Convergence of voice, video and data and the introduction of 3G telecom technology, along with the launch of low-cost computers, is expected to speed up this process, reducing the digital divide and bringing information within the reach of more people.’ —*Philip Mathew*



Robert Astorino addressing the meeting

Expanding participation

Thirteenth conference on World Mission and Evangelism held in Greece

On Sunday, 15 May, Christians from more than 100 nations, representing churches in every geographic region and most of the historic traditions of Christianity, closed their conference on world mission and evangelism in a 'sending service' in central Athens, on the site of Saint Paul's sermon to the Athenians.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), preached where Paul acknowledged the local context of the philosophers of Athens but also proclaimed the universal significance of the gospel. Standing on the Areopagus, or 'Mars Hill', Paul taught that God had created all nations 'so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.'

Testimony to diversity

The 13th Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, meeting from 9 to 16 May 2005 on the Aegean shore east of Athens, was a testimony to the diversity of the worldwide religion that grew from the apostolic message. While discovering many signs of unity in their midst, the 650 participants also sought to address the world's divisions when discussing the conference theme, 'Come Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile! Called in Christ to be healing and reconciling communities'.

Member churches of the WCC provided representatives of the Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Baptist, Independent, United, African Instituted and Pentecostal traditions. In addition, a significant number of Pentecostal and evangelical churches not belonging to the WCC were in attendance and, for the first time at such a conference, a substan-



Supporting the cross

tial delegation of forty-two representatives from the Roman Catholic Church came not as observers but full members. For many, the conference was characterised primarily by its 'expanding participation'.

Marketplaces of ideas

The atmosphere of the conference differed from many ecumenical assemblies, allowing considerable time for common prayer, Bible study and small group discussion of matters relating to the themes of reconciliation and healing. Plenaries explored subthemes such as building community, overcoming violence, confronting HIV/AIDS and promoting a church that is open to people of every physical and spiritual condition. Marketplaces of ideas and experience, bearing the Greek name 'synaxeis', gave further opportunities to examine issues not on the formal agenda.

A call to reconciliation

The conference participants recognised that divisions among Christians persist, but that

changes affecting the world in the new millennium form an unprecedented challenge to Christian mission and witness, and call the churches to repentance and reconciliation. A 'message', or formal letter from the conference to the churches, drafted by participants during the week, was referred to the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism for completion.

Striking symbol

One striking symbol of the life of the conference was a five-metre standing cross, a gift of the Christian churches of Jerusalem. At the closing plenary, Rev. Ruth Bottoms, the moderator of the conference, announced that the cross will be taken to Porto Alegre, Brazil, for the WCC's 9th Assembly in February 2006. There it will aid in telling the story of the mission conference, and of those who suffer in the land of Christ's birth. Afterwards, it will be returned to Athens to be preserved by the churches in Greece.

—WCC

Payap names new president

Dr Pradit Takerangrangsarit was elected president of Payap University by the board of trustees at a meeting held on 21 May. He will take office from 1 June 2006. Dr Pradit, on the CCA general committee, has been vice-president for student affairs. He will serve as the senior vice president of the university before he takes charge from Dr Boonthong Poocharoen. Payap University was founded by the Church of Christ in Thailand. In 1948 it was the first private college in Thailand to be granted full university status.

Iglesia Filipina Independiente elects supreme bishop

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Philippine Independent Church) held its tenth general assembly on 8–10 May 2005 under the theme 'Encourage and Build Up One Another' (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

The assembly elected the Most Rev. Godofredo J. David as the new obispo maximo. The obispo maximo (supreme bishop) is the chief executive officer, spiritual head and chief pastor of the eight million faithful of the church.

The new obispo maximo is the eleventh in the line of succession of primatial leadership beginning with Monsignor Gregorio Labayen Aglipay, when the Iglesia Filipina Independiente separated from the friar-dominated Roman church in 1902.

Godofredo J. David was consecrated a bishop in 1995. He was elected as general secretary of the church in 1999.

Also elected were the Right Rev. Ephraim Fajutagana as general secretary, Saturnino Garvida as general treasurer for a second term, and Reynaldo Evangelista as general auditor.

Obituary

WCC pioneer

Paul Abrecht, one of the pioneering generation of ecumenical leaders, died in Geneva after a short illness. He was 87. An economist and theologian by training and a pastor of the American Baptist Convention by ordination, Abrecht joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) staff in 1949, less than a year after the world body was formed. Appointed to head up the council's new study program on Church and Society issues, he was to develop a distinctive approach to helping churches address contentious social issues by drawing on the insights of talented Christian laypersons.

Three of his achievements were a far-reaching study of the gospel and rapid social

change in the 1950s, a world conference on Christians in the social and technical revolutions of our time in 1966, and a study on faith, science and the future in the 1970s.

'He was the ecumenical entrepreneur par excellence,' said David Gill, who served on Abrecht's staff for five years from 1968. 'Paul had a genius for spotting key issues and identifying the best minds. Then he would bring them together in a creative and sometimes tumultuous mix, out of which he managed to extract authoritative guidance for churches struggling to come to grips with a complex, changing world.'

Abrecht served the WCC for more than three decades, until his retirement in 1983. 'His enthusiasm never wavered and his vision never dimmed,' said David Gill. 'Paul Abrecht was widely respected and much loved, a special gift of God to the churches of the world.'

Farewell to Ahn Jae Woong

Church and ecumenical leaders paid tribute to Ahn Jae Woong at a farewell meeting organised by CCA in Hong Kong on 27 May. They recalled the contributions made by Ahn, who retired as general secretary of CCA and returned to his home country, Korea, on 30 May.

The speakers said that Ahn promoted ecumenical leadership formation throughout his ecumenical ministry.

Dr David Suh, Rev. Kwok Kai Wang, Dr Christine Ledger, Dr Rose Wu and Dr Rakesh Peter Dass expressed appreciation for his

strong conviction and commitment to the ecumenical movement.

During the dinner, the book, *Windows into Ecumenism*, published in honour of Ahn Jae Woong was launched by the Anglican Archbishop of Hong Kong and Macau, Peter Kwong. This book has 28 essays, introduced by Dr Preman Niles. Dr David Suh has written the foreword. (See page 30.)

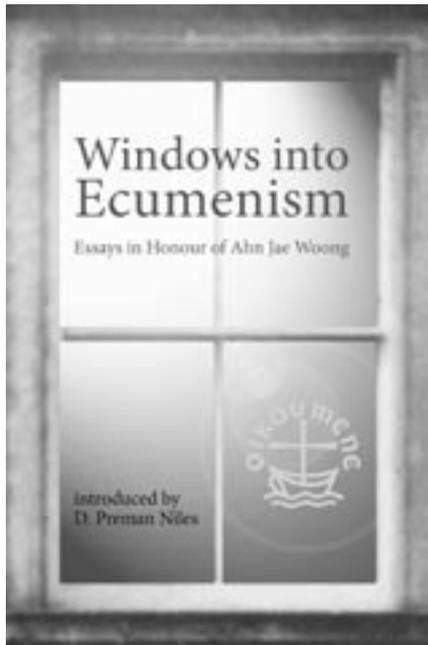
Ahn Jae Woong said that he was going from CCA but not leaving the ecumenical movement, where he will continue to be involved and work in different capacities.



Ahn Jae Woong at the farewell with former CCA staff member, Christine Ledger, and former CCA president, Wong Wai Ching

Windows into Ecumenism: Essays in Honour of Ahn Jae Woong

introduced by D. Preman Niles
CCA, US\$15



‘The fact that some twenty-eight ecumenically minded persons from all parts of the globe were willing to take time off from their busy schedules and write for a book honouring Ahn Jae Woong is itself an acknowledgment of the gentle but decisive impact that he has had on the ecumenical movement as a whole.’ So says D. Preman Niles in introducing *Windows into Ecumenism: Essays in Honour of Ahn Jae Woong*.

As Ahn Jae Woong retires as general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia his friends and colleagues have joined together to produce this tribute to his life and work.

The contributions that make up this book are as varied as the books of the Bible. They range from letters to history, from theology to prophesy, from politics to social concerns. Preman Niles has attempted to bring in some order by grouping them into sections on the ecumenical movement, the Asian ecumenical movement, faith movements and people’s movements, but their scope is far broader. Indeed the diversity of the essays is the appeal and worth of this book. David Kwang-sun Suh, executive director of the Christian Higher Education Institute, says, ‘This volume should be an ongoing textbook in theological schools and churches all over the world on ecumenics, missiology, interfaith/interreligious dialogue, feminist theology. Asian contextual theology and political ethics.’

Throughout this book is the influence of the man himself to whom the book is dedicated. Ahn’s lifelong concern for the ecumenical movement and leadership formation has brought these essays to fruition.

Preman Niles continues, ‘For me the word that best describes Ahn’s faith and commitment is “integrity”. And it is that characteristic that has been the hallmark of his involvement in the ecumenical movement locally, regionally and globally. Besides characterising the excellent leadership he has provided in the ecumenical institutions he has served, his integrity has also made him probe the frontiers of the ecumenical enterprise at a time of crisis. He has raised questions and pointed to neglected areas of work as he went along.

‘This title reflects two concerns that run through all of the essays, though they address diverse facets of the ecumenical movement from various angles. One is that while the institutions of the ecumenical movement may be in some sort of crisis, the ecumenical movement itself is alive.

‘The second is that the challenges that are posed to the ecumenical movement and the challenges the ecumenical movement itself poses need further enquiry, if ecumenical obedience in our time is to be both possible and credible. Each essay is a window into the ecumenical movement as it is and as it could be.’

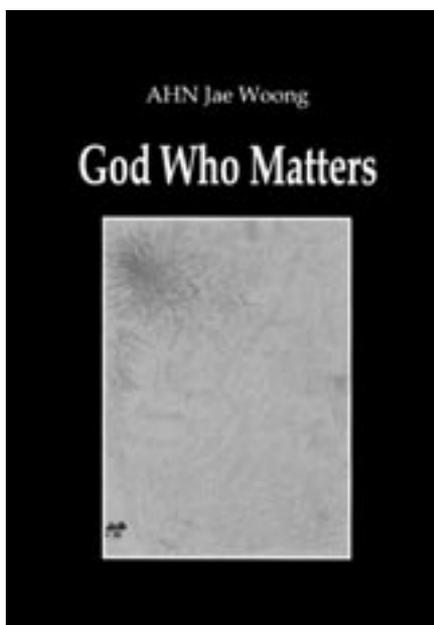
God Who Matters

by Ahn Jae Woong
CCA, US\$10

God Who Matters is a collection of ecumenical sermons and lectures presented by the general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, Ahn Jae Woong, on various occasions. As general secretary of CCA, Ahn has pleaded with national leaders to promote peace with justice and to stop all kinds of violence, even in the name of the ‘War on Terror’. All too familiar with the conflicts that plague Asia, Ahn has witnessed against military action as a means for ‘national security’. He continues to promote peace on multiple levels, and works to end racism, religious intolerance and gender violence throughout Asia. One can almost smell Ahn’s Korean experience in the political struggle with the people, which has formed the basis for his perspective.

The first half of the book contains fourteen sermons. delivered on various occasions on various themes. The second half contains six lectures.

The sermons are brief reflections on given texts. Two things stand out in these short studies: precise social analysis (which has become important in ecumenical discussions and sermons) and a concern for peace in Asia and the world. Descriptions of Asian situations and the social and political analysis of the situations receive importance in having a biblical text as a background. This is understandable, having in mind the author’s insistence that these are ecumenical sermons. A proper understanding of the situation or the context is important here.



The second sermon, which bears the title of the book, 'God Who Matters', highlights the ecumenical thrust: 'The ecumenical movement is not an exclusive movement of Protestants, with some Orthodox and Roman Catholics. The world oikumene means "the whole household of God" and that includes everyone and everything in the cosmos. The movement for ecumenism should therefore include other groups, Christians or otherwise, religious or otherwise. It should include not just humanity but the whole of God's creation'. This echoes the author's farsightedness. By coining three new words he tries to give a 'wider' meaning to the word ecumenism—'theo-ecumenics', 'eco-ecumenics' and 'geo-ecumenics'. The author proposes these as new values for a 'new ecumenism'.

The sermon titled 'A Turn Around' is a genuine call to all nations as well as individuals to take a look around the other side of what we cherish as our own. This call is an important one in the present world situation. Ahn emphatically points out, 'Our risen Lord, Jesus is constantly calling on us to turn around from old habits, old beliefs, old customs, old thoughts, old traditions and old work patterns.' When he comments that ecumenical commitments are like 'casting our bread upon the water' we listen in attention to a man with years of experience in the ecumenical movement. His humanity comes out when he says that all we can do is to listen to Paul: 'I sowed the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow.'

The next section contains six ecumenical lectures. In the first lecture, given at the 120th anniversary celebrations of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, he gives some practical guidelines for mission in Asia. Though the lecture was given particularly to the Korean church, it has a wider relevance. In the lecture titled 'Building a Culture of Peace in Asia today' he shares his concern for peace in Asia and in the world. His analysis of the Asian situation is precise. He suggests that in order to be a peace builder, we need to build peace movements and strengthen peace networks in society and in the community we live in.

This book is a potpourri of various ecumenical positions. It brings together various trends from the ecumenical world. At the time when Dr Ahn steps down from office as the general secretary of CCA this book establishes him as an ecumenical thinker and leader.

—*Mohan Larbeer*

Axis of Peace: Christian Faith in Times of Violence and War

S. Wesley Ariarajah
WCC Publications

Searching and divisive questions linger in the aftermath of the war in Iraq. Christians and their churches contemplate age-old yet unresolved issues: What does the Bible teach about war and violence, peace and peacemaking? Are there 'just wars'? What constitutes patriotism when one's nation is under attack? Is there theological justification for armed struggle in pursuit of liberation? How can hatred be overcome so that reconciliation may be achieved?

S. Wesley Ariarajah explores these questions to encourage ongoing conversations in faith communities. Surveying instances of violence in many regions of the world, often involving confrontations between religious communities, S. Wesley Ariarajah, from Sri Lanka, and a professor of ecumenical theology at Drew University in the USA, examines what violence does to those who perpetrate it, as well as to those who suffer. Moving beyond simplistic notions of 'good' and 'evil' in world affairs, he calls on people of faith to counter terror in all its forms through the creation of an 'axis of peace'.



Blessed are the peacemakers

Following the tsunami, CCA youth intern, Erdian Sembiring, went back to Indonesia to help in the immediate relief work in Meulaboh, West Aceh. His personal account of his experience points to the self-sacrificing attitude of some youth volunteers who were also there to help.

Although we were still on Christmas holidays when the tsunami happened I wanted to go to Aceh or Nias. I did not really know what I could do. Maybe it was just a spontaneous reaction from a youth and also a sense of national solidarity. I knew I could not do much but at least I could contribute a little and join others!

volunteer was very risky, not to mention a sacrifice of time and resources. In the course of our relief work, one of the student volunteers said, 'I did not take a bath for two days because I spent my time in the refugee camp.' Another recounted that in the first few weeks they ate instant noodles without cooking them because it was difficult to find clean water and there was just no time.



Erdian in tsunami-devastated Aceh

I soon realised that the disaster was creating even more violence among the victims. A kind of opportunism was prevalent—some volunteers took things from the dead bodies, e.g. jewellery, and the rents for houses and vehicles around the devastated areas grew higher. It was difficult for volunteers who only had themselves and their commitment to offer.

Another thing that added insult to injury came through the theology that was propagated in some Christian communities—that the disaster in Aceh was a sign of God's judgment and punishment for the people in the area. I cannot accept such a theology for I believe that God is God of the universe. What we can do is to pause for a while and reflect on what God really wants us to do in the face of such a disaster.

In Meulaboh, I worked with a network of organisations from Medan, including a Muslim organisation and a Catholic group. Most of them were university students and graduates, whose only reason for being there was simply to help. Going to Aceh as a

Despite the lack of resources, these youth and students persevered. One time we were tasked to distribute medical aid to Pase Teunom. It took us eleven hours to get there, using an alternative way through the jungle and a palm plantation.

We travelled in the dark, through the rain, and often we had to push the jeep or walk. I heard one of the volunteers saying that even if he must die in that situation, he was ready and happy to do so. He could only say so because he really wanted to help. We could not eat our dinner that night. We started our trip at 3.30 pm and reached Pase Teunom by 3 am. So we ate dinner and breakfast together.

It was a meaningful experience for me to meet these young people and students who willingly sacrificed themselves, their studies, their time and their families to go to a place that they have not been to before. Although I cannot mention their names now, I strongly believe that they are true peacemakers. Blessed are they who selflessly helped and shared their love with others!