Seek Peace and Pursue It - Reflection on the Theme of the 62nd Graduate School

Dagmar Heller

Peace is what God wants for the world. But if we look at our world today, we see: there is no peace in the Middle East, in Pakistan or Egypt and in Nigeria between Christians and Muslims. There is no peace between South Korea and North Korea, – and the list could go on. Peace is something which we desperately need for our world.

Is there a specific Christian understanding of peace? In the Hebrew Testament the word for peace is *shalom*, which is more than just the absence of war and more than just living next to the other. *Shalom* is the state of the world in which it is whole and everything is intact. It means peace in the society, peace between old and young, rich and poor, those who have work and those who are without work. *Shalom* means peace between husband and wife, parents and children, humans and nature, and peace with oneself. *Shalom* is the opposite of chaos. *Shalom* is what God had in mind when he created the world.

On the other hand, it is God himself, who guarantees *shalom*. In the New Testament it becomes clear: Jesus Christ is peace and his message is the “gospel of peace”. Peace is, therefore not something we as human beings can bring about and create. But at the same time it is given to us as a task.

The pioneers of the ecumenical movement emphasized that Christians cannot work for peace in a credible way if they do not do this together. This was already said by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, “I therefore…beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Peace is the main element of unity! But how do we achieve this peace? According to the apostle there are four attitudes which are essential for peace: humility, gentleness, patience and love.

The studies in Bossey offer the unique opportunity to get to know people from cultures which are very different from one’s own. Students live together with people from...
A well known German ecumenist of the 1970s, Ernst Lange, once wrote to the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to explain why he had accepted the invitation to join the staff in Geneva. He wrote: “I want to do something for peace”.

Lange immediately realised that he was using “grand words” and felt “rather embarrassed”. Years later, reflecting on the ecumenical movement in his acclaimed book titled And Yet it Moves..., Lange came to the conclusion that he did not have to revise the statement that he had earlier felt embarrassed about.

The ecumenical movement “is a movement for peace” Lange noted emphatically with italics. And a church which ceases to understand itself in terms of Jesus of Nazareth’s shalom, “is not church but non-church,” he wrote. If shalom can only be understood ecumenically, then the “ecumenical commitment at once becomes a criterion of the authenticity of the Church’s existence today”.

The umbrella theme of the 2010-2011 Bossey Graduate School, “Seek peace and pursue it” while borrowed from the Psalms helps to deepen Lange’s insight into the link between the vision of the One Church and the dream of peace on earth. It also points to the WCC 2011 Ecumenical International Peace Convocation (IEPC) being held in Kingston, Jamaica in May 2011.

This issue of Beyond Boundaries pursues a focus on peace and unity by connecting you to Bossey today and the upcoming peace convocation. Bossey professor Dagmar Hel-ler reflects on shalom and talks with new Bossey students about Christian unity and peace. Female students preparing a Bossey/University of Geneva Master Degree reflect on Christian unity in light of their Bossey experience. You will also be introduced to a former Bossey student currently in a WCC governing position and learn about Bossey friends in Germany and the UK who are supporting the Institute.

Finally, we will introduce you to our colleague Betty Hembert and offer an update on recent publications by the Bossey faculty.

Peace!

Odair P. Mateus

from front page churches which are very different from their own and therefore have quite different ways of practicing their faith. But these others, these strangers, are becoming neighbors in Bossey as class mates, teachers, kitchen staff, the librarian, receptionists and housekeepers. This requires - more than in their normal lives at home - humility, gentleness, patience and love. But without these four virtues ecumenism and peace are not possible.

Some of the students of the 62nd Graduate School come from countries experiencing serious conflicts. Examining their expectations for their studies at Bossey in relation to their future work, they said the following: “I hope that studying in Bossey will help me to continue working for the unity among the Christians in Palestine. Being split into twelve main church families we have to promote unity, to be witnesses and to seek to speak with a prophetic voice against any kind of injustice or violation of human rights. Only

continued on page 4

BEYOND BOUNDARIES WISHES TO ALL ITS READERS A VERY PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2011!
Serving eight congregations spread over a distance of 110 km is something that Rev. Georgina Mukupa from Zambia takes in her stride. The United Church of Zambia pastor smiles broadly when she talks about juggling all the responsibilities that come with her calling, while at the same time grappling with the big theological questions that arise when you are a graduate student in a Master of Theology in Ecumenical Studies course. “Here we can share experiences about our faith and I have made new friends from around the world” referring to her roommate from Romania. “We can live together. I can have discussions with a Dominican Sister from the Philippines and Lutheran sister from Tanzania. Even our visit to the Lutheran Church in Geneva is such a new experience.”

Part of the mission of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey is to shape ecumenical thought through inter-cultural and inter-confessional encounter, and through common worship and life in community. Ecumenical formation, as well as faith nurturing at community and academic levels, are considered vital for the renewal of the ecumenical movement and provide living proof of the value of the programme.

Kateryna Kuks, who is from the Republic of Belarus, and is a candidate in the Master of Theology in Ecumenical Studies programme. Mukupa says that being part of the student body at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey is part of her “spiritual journey”, and that from the beginning, she felt that being here, with different people, from different backgrounds and different faiths, is about “the spirit of ecumenism”.

“Bossey is my great experience”, says Wararat Chaisuk, a Presbyterian from Thailand and enrolled in the Master of Advanced Ecumenical Studies programme. “I always wanted to know more about God”, reflects Ukrainian Iryna Havryshkeyvych, whose faith tradition is Greek-Catholic. Her quest for knowledge first saw her achieve a Masters degree in Economics and Business, and then brought her here, to Bossey to graduate in the Master of Advanced Ecumenical Studies. She explains that from the age of 16, she wanted to study theology, but “never dared.”

continued on page 7
Bossey Alumni in the Leadership of the WCC

Rev. Sanele Faasua Lavatai, Director of Christian Education in the Methodist Church of Samoa and Master of Ecumenical Studies alumnus from the academic year 2003-2004 was elected to the Executive and Central Committees of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre February 2006. It is the first time that his church has a member in both Committees since it joined the WCC in 1975. It is also the first time that a Samoan is serving as an executive committee member.

In addition Rev. Lavatai is a member of the executive committee of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and becomes the first ever Bossey Master alumnus to be elected to all these governance bodies. Since his election Sanele has returned to the place of his international ecumenical studies several times on the occasions of both committee meetings. He told Beyond Boundaries that his Master degree from the Ecumenical Institute was the main reason why he was supported by the churches in the Pacific region to these posts.

“I have accepted this commitment”, he said in his humble style, “because it is another level of ecumenical experience and will allow me to feel the ecumenical atmosphere from another perspective, that of a governance. It is a challenge to put in practice the decisions of the Assembly and the resources available.”

To honour his studies in Bossey, Sanele established a scholarship named Bossey Ecumenical Institute Scholarship Award to cover the costs of grade 7 in George Brown Primary School in Samoa.

“To study in Bossey is very useful for us, because it is increasing our knowledge about Christianity and also about the Bible. When we go back to our country we will teach in Sunday school and women’s formation. We have many Muslims in our country (Pakistan), with whom we work together in our professional lives. Here in Bossey we learn to respect the differences and appreciate the commons among our peoples.” (Graduate School students- Razia Bashir from the Christian Fellowship and Sumerad Sadaf Gill from the Baptist Church, Pakistan). BB
News from the Faculty

One of the tasks of the faculty members of the Ecumenical Institute is to do research. Here are references to some of their recent publications:

Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué:

Dagmar Heller:
- Sakramentologia v hermenevticheskoi perspektive, in: Pravoslavnoe utschenie o zerkovnich tainstvach, Moskva 2009, 67-81

Paul J. Isaak:
- Studying and Doing Theologies in the Life of the theological students. Four years of contact with pastors and theological students was contagious I joined the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University. At the end of the first cycle of studies I decided to pursue my theological formation in Geneva. I did not finish my studies, but I settled in the Geneva region. For the past two years, I’ve been back to a position similar to what I had in Strasbourg. At Bossey, I just had to drop Alsacienc in favour of English.

Betty: They have to do with authenticity and respect. Prayer leads us to our right place. It invites us to be ourselves. When we gather for prayer, we are all equal in the presence of God regardless of our differences. Prayer invites us to respect ourselves and others. I believe that these elements are fundamental in my life and in my work, which includes welcoming people at Bossey so that their stay among us will be as pleasant as possible. Beyond simple “courtesy”, I try to show our guests that I respect them for who they are and this, I believe, helps to deepen our encounter and relations and helps them to feel more comfortable at Bossey.

Have You Met
Betty Hembert?

BB: It looks as though the words “church”, “theology”, and “hospitality” are very much part of your biography…

Betty: That’s right. After some German studies at the University of Strasbourg, I worked for seven years in the offices of the Reformed and Lutheran churches in Alsace and Lorraine, in the same building which houses the residence for students and guests come from much wider geographic and confessional horizons. This makes the human experience very rich and interesting.

BB: We see you welcoming people at the Bossey reception, but also leading the Bossey community in prayer. How do you relate prayer and hospitality?

Betty: How has the work with Bossey students and visitors impacted your life?

Betty: Each guest, each stu-
News from the Bossey Friends

From the left: Rajendra Mekala, Irina Havryshkevych, Joachim Weiler, Antje Hanselmann, Dagmar Heller and Christian Noeske at the Bossey stand in the German Ecumenical Kirchentag.

Germany

From 12-16 May 2010 the Bossey Friends in Germany sponsored a stand at the second German Ecumenical Kirchentag in Munich. The stand included information material as well as a visual presentation of the Ecumenical Institute. The new programme brochure together with the latest issue of “Beyond Boundaries” were distributed to a large number of Kirchentag-visiters. The stand was also visited by former students, Blue Angel volunteers and other friends. Together with the Ecumenical Institute the Bossey Friends sponsored the participation of two Master students Irina Havryshkevych and Rajendra Mekala, who worked at the stand together with Dagmar Heller (professor), Christian Noeske, Antje Hanselmann and Stephan Schwarz (former vicars at Bossey), Henning Meinecke (former intern at Bossey) and Joachim Weiler (visitor at Bossey).

United Kingdom

Members of the UK Bossey Network held their annual meeting in London on October 18, 2010. Since 1998, the network has supported the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey through prayer, publicity, recruitment, and fund raising. They are planning their next visit to Bossey for September 2011 and will bring a group of ordinands from various theological schools in the UK. The goal is to give participants an experience of ecumenical formation and encounter with the global dimension of ecumenism and mission. The visit will provide opportunity for broad sharing and interaction with students of the Graduate School.

Backrow, left to right: Chris Batten, Paul Ballard, Simon Oxley, Angela Berners-Wilson, Martin Conway. Frontrow, left to right, John Bradley, Donald Norwood, David Tatem, Roger Spiller.

Photo: K. Brownlee
She pauses, and then explains that as she cannot be ordained in her church, “people always ask ‘what will you do, who will you be?’ But you cannot believe in an occupation”, adding that right now, for her, the more important question is “what is my faith?” “There is so much sharing, so many discussions that are so much deeper than those [with friends] back home,” adds Koni Patrick, who is a member of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. Living and studying at Bossey is “making it all come alive”, says this Master of Theology in Ecumenical Studies student. Smiling, she reflects that she is thinking of applying her knowledge in making a difference when she graduates and returns home. “I am thinking of working with and for women,” she says. She calls her pursuits “peace work”, referring to the ongoing interfaith clashes that have marred peace efforts in the north of her country. As a theologian, she believes that “women have a role to play”. BB

(*) Callie Long is a freelance writer who interviewed the students for this story published originally in the 2009 Annual Review of the WCC.

Upcoming events

- 26 January 2011
  The Closing Ceremony of the 62nd Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies

- 4-6 March 2011
  Research Conference

- July 2011: Building an Interfaith Community

---

I WISH TO:
- Support the work of Bossey by a gift of _____________
  Please, see instructions on page 8.

- Receive Beyond Boundaries:
  Please, write your address below.

- Change my address:
  Please, write your address below.

Family name:
First name:
Street address:
Postal code:
Town:
Country:

Place for a postal stamp.

The Ecumenical Institute
Beyond Boundaries
P.O.Box 1000
CH-1299 Crans-près-Céligny
SWITZERLAND
The Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey was founded in 1946. It is attached to the Autonomous Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva and part of the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization representing some 560 million Christians on all continents of the globe. Since 1946, thousands of women and men from numerous countries and most Christian confessions and cultures have come to Bossey for seminars, conferences and academic study programmes. Many have testified to life-changing experiences in this “ecumenical laboratory”.

More information about the academic programme or how the contemporary hospitality facilities in splendid historical surroundings overlooking the French Alps may be of use to You can be found in: www.bossey.ch.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF BOSSEY!

* By online giving: 
  www.bossey.ch > Support Bossey > Online giving

* By bank transfer: Banque Cantonale Vaudoise (BCV)
  Case postale 300, CH-1001 Lausanne, Switzerland
  Account holder: The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey
  IBAN: CH81 0076 7000 U067 5255 7
  Swift code: BCVLCH2LXXX

* By postal account: (in Switzerland only)
  Account holder: The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey
  CCP: 12-17719-8

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

is a periodic newsletter of the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey.

Editorial Team: Dagmar Heller, Odair P. Mateus and Anu Talvivaara.
Printed at the Ecumenical Institute in November 2010.
The Ecumenical Institute shall not be under any liability to any person in respect of any damage, however caused, which may be incurred or which arises directly or indirectly from reliance on information in this publication.