

UCC Newsletter

E

K

PUBLISHED BY:
THE UCC-EKU WORKING GROUP
VOL. XX, NO. 1 DECEMBER, 2003

MISSION HOUSE CENTER
LAKELAND COLLEGE
SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN

Dear Friends,

The UCC-UEK Working Group is grateful to those among you who have sent gifts, helping make this issue of the newsletter possible.

This issue begins with a Christmas letter from Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem in the Palestinian territories. Dr. Raheb is well known to many both within the UCC and the UEK for his faithful and courageous witness to the Gospel. Pastor Raheb serves as General Director of the important International Center of Bethlehem which is attempting to maintain dialogue among people of faith and others amidst the present deep crisis in the Holy Land. His letter was sent to us via Bishop Hans-Juergen Abromeit of the Evangelical Church in Pomerania. The essay by Dr. Lee Barrett, Professor of Systematic Theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, relates to the World Council of Churches' theme "The Decade to Overcome Violence" and was part of an international colloquy held June 24-27, 2003 at Lakeland College in Plymouth Wisconsin. The colloquy is a "child" of "Kirchengemeinschaft" that has been fostered between the college and the Pastorkolleg of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (Haus Villigst at Schwerte, Westphalia). The colloquy was attended by pastors and laity from the UEK, the UCC, and the Evangelical and Reformed Synod of Honduras. We are grateful to Dr. Reinhard Groscurth, Oberkirchenrat i. R. and for many years ecumenical officer of the Evangelical Church of the Union (West) for his moving tribute to Dr. Harold Wilke, whose commitment to ecumenicity and the mission of the Church helped bring to birth "Full Communion" years ago. Included in this issue is also a report from the closing synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union (186 years from its founding!) which took place at the Johannisstift in Berlin, April 11-12, 2003. The booklet closes with gratitude for the life and witness of Dr. Ruben Huenemann (1909-2003), a great friend of "Kirchengemeinschaft."

Frederick R. Trost
Editor

Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will not pass away.

Mark 13:31

While all the powers of Good aid and attend us
boldly we'll face the future, come what may.
At even, and at morn, God will befriend us,
and oh, most surely on each new year's day!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

It is the Christ of Bethlehem who must teach us to identify with the poor. It is the Christ of the Beatitudes who must be in the measure of what we value in life. It is the Christ of Golgotha who must show us what in life is worthwhile laying down our lives for.

Joan Chittister, OSB

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer into our souls.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Late have I loved You, O beauty so ancient and so new.
Late have I loved You.
For behold You were within me, and I outside.
And I sought you outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things you have made.
You were with me, and I was not with You.
I was kept from You by those things, yet had they not been in You, they would not have been at all.
You called and cried to me to break open my deafness,
And You sent forth Your beams and You shone upon me and chased away my blindness.
You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for You.
I tasted You, and now hunger and thirst for You.
You touched me, and I have burned for Your peace.

Saint Augustine

A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer lives are based on the labors of others, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.

Albert Einstein

Table of Contents

“Christmas, Peace, and the Wall” by Mitri Raheb	1
“Christianity: Balm of Peace or Bomb of Violence?” by Lee Barrett	2
“Harold Wilke—Servant, Bridge-builder, Friend” by Reinhard Groscurth	11
“The Closing Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union” by Frederick Trost	14
“In Memoriam” (A Tribute to Ruben Huenemann)	18

Christmas, Peace, and the Wall

by Mitri Raheb

Our Christmas message this year might sound a little unusual. For many, it might not be too “Christmassy”. Christmas has become the feast of “a sort of peace” that no one really can fully describe. In fact, it is kind of a “cheap peace”, which is something to preach about when one is not well prepared, or a bit of wishful thinking, when one is not ready to do much. Personally, I am bored with all of this talk about peace around Christmas time. Christmas has become a season for “joyful peace talkers,” rather than “blessed peacemakers.”

In our Palestinian context, “peace talk” is often a good recipe for managing the conflict rather than resolving it. As the world continues to talk peace, Israel continues to build the wall and while Christians continue singing “O Little Town of Bethlehem”, Israel makes sure that the town stays as little as possible. As little as two square miles, surrounded with walls, fences and trenches with no future expansion possibilities whatsoever.

No one understood what peace really is... like St. Paul. He himself, a former Jewish leader, a zealot, a persecutor, and a hard-liner; he committed himself to making sure that a wall of separation (was) built and kept between his community and its enemies. He was ready to attack and even terrorize whoever dared to question the importance of this wall for the security of his community. However, this same radical person was radically transformed. He had a unique encounter that made him discover what peace really means, and he described it as “breaking down dividing walls of hostility.” (cf. Ephesians 2:14). From that moment, the zealot Saul became the passionate apostle Paul. His great discovery was that if God himself in Christ has broken the walls of hostility between the human and the divine, then there is no place for walls between peoples, tribes, cultures and nations. For his conviction, he was ready to pay a heavy price.

At a time when a wall of hostility is being built around our little town, we at the International Center of Bethlehem commit ourselves anew to breaking down all walls of hatred and hostilities, be (they) concrete walls or ideological, racial, political, social, (or) economic ones. From the hometown of Christ we have no other message this year but this of St. Paul: “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us”. We wish you nothing less than to experience this transforming power of Christmas to strengthen you in 2004 in your commitment to breaking down walls, to peace-making, and to bridge building.

(For the latest news from Bethlehem, please visit the Center’s website: www.annadwa.org.
The new media website is: www.bethlehemmedia.net)

Bethlehem, December 23, 2003

“Christianity: Bomb of Violence or Balm of Peace?”

Lee Barrett

As I was writing this essay, the morning news was dolefully recounting the current list of Palestinian strikes against Israelis, and Israeli retaliations against Palestinians. A story about Palestinian children playing “suicide bomber” was followed by the roster of U.S. troops who had been killed by Iraqis during the past week. In fact, that day a full 65% of the news stories on CNN involved tales of violence.

This barrage of televised violence suggests a phenomenon that is so global that it cannot merely be due to the uniquely evil character of a few individuals. The sheer frequency of episodes and the cross-cultural universality of their recurrence points to some common root in the human heart. The propensity to violence seems to be so intractable that it can not be dismissed as a mere cognitive failure to appreciate others. The wound is far deeper than that. We are frightened by the violence in the news and in ourselves. Consequently, social scientists and philosophers have tried to account for the severity and pervasiveness of humanity’s disease. This search is different from the older quest for psychological mechanisms. Perhaps violent tendencies are engendered by childhood traumas, as Alice Miller has proposed. Or perhaps adverse social conditions, like poverty and social marginalization, foster debilitating self-doubts that in turn motivate violent compensatory efforts to establish superiority, as Ervin Staub has argued. Or perhaps we humans try to overcome our own fears of weakness by encouraging feelings of weakness in potentially threatening others, as C. Fred Alford has argued. Maybe Carl Jung is right that we project our unacknowledged shadow side onto alien others and then attack that which we fear and hate in ourselves. And we must not forget Ernst Becker’s theory that our universal desire for some sort of symbolic immortality produces a delusional urge to identify with the power of life and death by slaughtering scapegoats. Also deserving a mention is Rene Girard’s theory that we humans imitate one another’s desires, therefore end up desiring the same objects, and then developing violent antipathies toward our competitors. More theologically inclined analysts like Charles Bellinger see violence as the desiring effort of us finite creatures to deny and escape from the unsettling prospect of spiritual growth to which God is calling us; to avoid further growth and still our restless hearts we construct an “other” that represents our deeper self and then kill it. These are interesting but not ultimately helpful.

It is impossible this side of the eschaton to access the respective merits and demerits of these theories of violence’s sources. Most are not amenable to any sort of empirical verification. Most try to find a single root for a complicated phenomenon. The new quest has taken a more cultural turn. The older theories fail to account for one of the most shocking aspects of contemporary violence: much of it seems to be motivated by religious passions. Ever since the rise of militant Shiite and Sunni fundamentalism, and the equally virulent ideology of the Christian right, social commentators have been riveting public attention on the mysterious connection of religion and violence with an intensity that has not been seen in western culture since the end of the Thirty Years’ War. From the tensions in the Middle East to the hostilities in Northern Ireland to the conflict between India and Pakistan, one of the primary motivating factors is manifestly religious conviction. This correlation of religion and violence leads to the suspicion that maybe religion itself begets violence. George W. Bush’s claim that all great religions are religions of “peace” seems to be empirically falsifiable. Historical evidence appears to suggest the contrary. In fact, his own religion is not particularly peaceful.

It is one aspect of this possible connection that I hope to explore. Violence probably has many sources. One may be religion. Most of us Christians, and I include myself in this number, are not competent to explore the roots of violence in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or any other religion. Are there ways in which Christianity itself inadvertently promotes violence? For more than a decade many Christians have been exploring precisely this issue. The investigation has generated much corporate self-analysis, self-recrimination, and sometimes self-flagellation. In extreme instances, the critics give the impression that human history would be the peaceable kingdom if only Christianity had not troubled the waters. This effort to discern the violent flaw in Christianity has spawned an opposite and equal effort to exonerate Christianity from all fault. Most of the members of this party then proceed to identify multiple ways in which Christianity actually serves as an antidote to humanity's propensity toward violence, so we have two parties: Revisionist vs. Orthodox. We will examine the arguments on both sides, hoping to sort out those aspects of Christianity which are potentially dangerous from those that contribute to God's reign of peace.

First a terminological digression is in order. Considerable controversy has arisen concerning exactly what "violence" is, often trying to distinguish "violence" from legitimate acts of coercion (like restraining a child who insists on playing in traffic) that compel or constrain a person's actions against her own will, or from invasive forms of persuasion. This leads to such questions as: Are forms of education that do not encourage critical distance from the learning process instances of pedagogical violence? Are economic regulations that do not provide for universal access to health care a type of violence? Is Gandhi-like civil disobedience a form of psych-social violence? Most of these terminological disputes have been unhelpful as quests for essences often are. As a counter strategy, I propose that we take a cue from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. As Wittgenstein suggested, let us not ask for the essential meaning of "violence," but rather ask about the use of the concept. In ordinary life, people successfully communicate with one another with the concept "violence," saying things like "That was a violent crime," or "That is a violent family." The concept "violence" has some widespread uses. Most frequently, it suggests physical harm or bodily damage. Hostile agency that disregards the well-being of the victim is typically involved. By extension, "violence" can connote damage to a person's dignity, autonomy, or self-esteem. In ordinary discourse, references are habitually made to psychological and sociological violence. Social structures that impose poverty or limit opportunities can be said to be "violent." We shall use "violence" to cover this loose family of related usages. So, does Christianity lead to violence?

Now back to our main theme. When it comes to theories that detect the roots of violence in Christianity, we suffer from a confusing embarrassment of riches. There are a lot. We will consider the many different proposals one after another, ranging from the most specific to the most broad, and from the easiest to correct (if the critique is valid), to the most difficult.

1. The first theory of Christian violence does not locate the source of the problem in anything essential to Christianity. Rather, the violence-producing culprits are to be found in tragic aberrations in the history of Christianity's development. The problem has nothing to do with the Bible, or with the original church of the apostles, but with a post-apostolic ecclesial fall from grace. Here the most popular candidate for the source of the declension into violence is the Constantinian revolution. According to this argument, the unholy alliance of church and empire served to introduce an ethic of martial and penal violence

into a religion which until then had been adamantly non-violent. After Constantine, the empire was sacralized and its defense became a sacred duty. The rulers of the social order became the presumed instruments of divine providence. Preservation of the social order and the (violent) status quo became the decisive criterion of ethical behavior. Consequently the cross, the symbol of non-retaliation against enemies, was converted into a sword. This set the stage for the evolution of the crusader notion of meritorious or penitential violence, linked to the image of the warrior-Christ. According to this view, had it not been for the post-Constantinian church's complicity in the Kingdom of This World and its violent underpinnings, Christianity would have remained innocent.

2. A second theory locates the problem in certain specific strands of the Bible which are regarded as peripheral to the Bible's central dynamics. Most notably, the rampant militarism in the Old Testament is singled out for opprobrium. The conquest of Canaan and its suggestions of genocide, as well as the aggressive imperialism of the Davidic monarchy have been particularly troubling to Christian ethicists from Clement of Alexandria on. Behind these passages Old Testament scholars have discerned an ideology of the God of Israel as the divine warrior, leading his hosts in lethal battle. Most of these critics go on to conclude that this glorification of militarism and divine rage is reversed and corrected by the more central and more pacific message of Jesus and many of the prophets. So ignore it.
3. A third argument, similar to the second theory's focus on a particular strand of biblical literature, locates the dangerous material in passages that valorize retributive justice. According to this critique, much of the deuteronomic tradition presupposes the law that demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This ethic is nothing more than a recipe for quid pro quo violence, in which the pain of the original offense is balanced by the equivalent pain of the punishment. The whole system is a careful calibration of violences. Behind this economy of reciprocal terror lies a primitive delight in vengeance, a primal desire to gloat at the sufferings of one's enemies. Proponents of this critique even find the prophet's yearnings for the destruction of Assyria to be an unfortunate catalyst of humanity's vicious cycle of retribution. Having exposed the potential evils of retributive justice they usually juxtapose it to the Jesus of the New Testament's more felicitous rejection of retribution.
4. A fourth and more troubling extension of this trajectory of biblical suspicion detects retributive violence in the New Testament itself, particularly in the doctrine of the atonement. Here matters become very sensitive, for the historic core of Christianity is at stake. According to the critics, the basic grammar of the doctrine of atonement is saturated with violent rhetoric, so that violence is indirectly validated by it. They observe that Christianity has obviously enshrined violence in its very heart. The killing of Jesus is the focal point of the sacred narratives, for the gospels are structured as passion narratives with extended introductions. Given that literary reality, it was almost inevitable that the cross would become the central symbol of the religion. Accordingly, in most theologies salvation is seen as flowing from an act of murder, an act of horrific violence which is justified by its necessary role in the salvific drama. Violence is redemptive. These critics set out to expose the legitimation of violence implied by most of the traditional theories of Christ's atoning work. In the "classical theory" of the early church, the crucifixion is interpreted as a

conflict between Christ as Satan, in which Christ triumphs through sheer force, trickery, or superior resources, all of which involve forms of violence. The critics point out that Christ's strategies to liberate humanity are suspiciously similar to the tactics of Satan. This tends to invite the believer to identify with the victoriously combative Christ and use aggression and guile against the perceived enemies of the gospel. Other critics focus on views of the atonement that see a struggle or tension between justice and mercy in God's own self, a tension which is resolved through the death of Jesus. In their assessment, the theories of Augustine and Luther relocate the violent conflict in the inner being of God; conflict is accounted for by subsuming it into God. God's internal violence is externalized in the fate of Jesus. When this doctrine is inscribed in the psyches of believers, they then become prone to go and do likewise by venting their inner tensions on innocent scapegoats. But the doctrine of atonement that attracts the most sustained criticism is, of course, the "western" satisfaction view and its derivative theory of penal substitution. According to some authors (like J. Denny Weaver and Anthony Bartlett) the "western" theory is most flagrantly rooted in an ideology of retributive violence. For Anselm, the font of the theory, violence done to God's honor had to be compensated by an equal amount of violence, hence, the death of Jesus. Once again violence, the violence of Christ's crucifixion, served as an exchange commodity in the divine economy. According to Weaver and Bartlett, this becomes explicit in Calvin's and subsequent Reformed theologians' theory of penal substitution, in which Jesus becomes the innocent substitute target of divine wrath. The violence that God has directed against Satan in the classical theory is now directed against humanity's representative. Many feminist theologians including Rebecca Parker, Joan Carlson Brown, and Rita Nakashima Brock, condemn this model of atonement as a glamorization of innocent suffering and as a stimulus for child abuse. Furthermore, the divine mandate that the innocent Jesus submit to suffering conditions women, who have historically been exhorted to imitate Christ's obedience, to accept patriarchal abuse. Julie Hopkins adds that the doctrine's underlying theme of suffering as redemptive punishment generates masochistic efforts to endure earthly violence for the sake of the deferral of divine violence. In the view of all these authors, the motif of the substitute victim serves as an incentive for turbulent Christian societies to search for social scapegoats. Consequently, the inner violent tensions of Europe and North America have been historically projected outward onto heretics, witches, Moslems, and Jews. The only solution, according to these analysts, is to abandon violent views of the atonement entirely and regard Jesus' death as a tragic by-product of his commitment to the non-violent reign of God. The cross should not be the central symbol.

5. A fifth attempt to identify the roots of Christian violence discovers the problematic strand in the apocalyptic heritage. At the end of history God will right all wrongs through a cataclysm of violence. The theme of the defeat of Satan abounds with images of unrestrained destruction. This has an erotic fascination. The prospect of Armageddon suggests that violence, albeit God's violence, undergirds the order of the universe. The expectation of the delayed violence of the Apocalypse unconsciously programs Christians to proleptically anticipate the final catastrophe by staging mini apocalypses of their own. All the objections raised against the classical model of atonement and against retributive justice can be raised here as well. "Vengeance is mine..." We are still sadistic. Revenge not now, but later.

6. A sixth and broader criticism of Christianity's violent propensities emerges from certain feminist theologians. They argue that any view of God as a transcendent "Other," providentially governing the cosmos from a secure position beyond it, is implicitly violent. For Rosemary Reuther the problem with the classical theistic understanding of God as a mighty sovereign ruling in the heavens is the non-reciprocal nature of the power relation between God and everything else. For Reuther, talk of divine omnipotence trades on the root metaphor of God as a despot. God has all the power and we have none at all, unless God chooses to give it to us. Any drastically asymmetrical power relationship like this is based on the implicit threat of force. God should be obeyed because God is powerful enough to clobber you. These theologians conclude that this understanding of God's transcendence then undergirds social hierarchies, with their implied threat that one must submit to the powers that be, whether they be the male gender, wealthy classes, privileged races, or militarily powerful nations, or expect destruction. Just as God governs the cosmos, so masters should govern slaves, men should govern women, and the 1st world should govern the 3rd world; resistance to this cosmic order will be met with severe reprisals. These authors conclude that nothing less than a revision of the doctrine of God itself will cure Christianity's violent tendencies. Only a more interactive model of God's involvement with the cosmos promises to counteract the legitimation of the use of superior force. ("Lover," "Friend," not "Lord.")

7. A seventh equally sweeping charge is that Christianity's very monotheism is the ultimate font of violence. The theological heirs of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida exercise impressive ingenuity in detecting the violent implications of any effort to define the essential meaning of any phenomenon. For them the basic problem with monotheism is not just the asymmetrical power disparity, but rather the fact that monotheism claims to be the exclusively accurate interpretation of the universe. Monotheism's mantra is "You shall have no other gods." (This is because the other gods are false.) This anti-syncretistic dynamic inevitably generates hostility toward all rival construals of ultimate reality. According to this critique, any human group that adheres to an all-encompassing ideology, imagining that it possess a handle on the way things really are, must dismiss all who think otherwise as being either evil or misguided. Ideological monolithic groups tend to fear dissenting opinions as delusions that are dangerous to society and the soul. Such opinions should be silenced, wither through persuasion, argument, or force. In the current jargon, "all totalizing discourses," of which monotheism is the archetype, are intolerant. Most of the critics in this camp go on to propose that not only is monotheism dangerous, but its claims to know the "truth" are bogus. Our current awareness of the degree to which cultural perspective and social location conditions perception casts suspicion on all claims to absolute knowledge. As the philosopher Richard Rorty has remarked, "No one knows much of anything about much of anything." As a result, a profound epistemic humility, a humility that monotheism unfortunately tends to rule out, is in order. Theologians of this type conclude that the only way for Christianity to become less violent is to jettison its claims to exclusive truth and entertain the possibility that alternative construals of reality, involving other conceptions of the divine, may be equally valid.

So, we are confronted with seven very different attempts to unearth the roots of violence in Christianity and seven different proposals concerning the

transformation of Christianity into a more consistently pacific religion. Given the historic churches' often sad implication in atrocities, all of these critiques should be taken seriously. At this point in human history we cannot afford to ignore any diagnosis of our dilemma, no matter how unflattering or far-fetched it may sound. However, these critiques are certainly not without their flaws. Most dangerously, all of them tend to be reductive, taking the avoidance of violence to be the highest good to which all other goods must be sacrificed. (The cross might lead to violence, so let's get rid of it.) As a consequence, they exhibit a lamentable tendency to throw out the baby with the bath water. Their extremes have generated a series of responses attempting to exonerate Christianity from accusations of intrinsic violence. It is to these responses that we shall now turn.

1. Let us begin with the argument that the Constantinian linkage of church and state inevitably enmeshes the pristine faith in state-sponsored violence. In response to this many U.S. ethicists would raise objections to a tradition running from Augustine to Reinhold Niebuhr. Yes, these theologians admit, the state all too easily identifies its own interests with the will of God and all too readily enlists Christianity to justify the self-serving recourse to violence. And, yes, the idolatrous pretensions of nationalistic and ethnocentric Christianity should be resisted. But to argue that God never works through secular history and secular institutions, including the state, would drive a wedge between God the Creator and God the Redeemer and foster a kind of de facto Manichaeism. A basic, non-negotiable Christian conviction is that God the Creator is still providentially active in the created order, including the messy world of political institutions and dynamics. The extremely tricky thing in the Christian life is the question of discerning which political actions and dynamics are more in accord with God's will than others. Because in this fallen world all social and political institutions use some means of coercion, which in extreme instances may involve some form of violence, Christians cannot totally afford all traffic with violence without abandoning participation in the created order. This is tragic and lamentable, but unavoidable. Consequently, strategies like just war theory have developed by Christians as tools to gage when state-sponsored violence is legitimate. So, Constantine's revolution was not a purely bad thing.
2. In response to the accusation that the militarism and genocidal violence in the Old Testament tends to reproduce itself in the psyches of subsequent Christians, some theologians, like George Lindbeck and David Steinmetz, have argued that the church has always employed a variety of interpretive strategies to neutralize the danger of violence. The Alexandrians developed the habit of allegorizing potentially offensive passages to a fine art. The Antiochenes discerned their true meaning in their typological prefiguration of the drama of salvation enacted in Jesus Christ. Early historical critics were able to regard the texts of terror as primitive stages in the history of the development of Israelite religion. More radical contemporary scholars simply dismiss the problematic passages as non-authoritative. Of these strategies, the first two, allegory and typology, which are also the oldest two, may continue to be the most

promising. Only they preserve a strong sense of Biblical authority that can avoid the quagmire of trying to determine which passages in Scripture are authoritative and which are not. Moreover, they can nullify the temptation to engage in copycat acts of violence. If the Canaanite tribes are not thought of as specific ethnic groups, but as symbols of all that is opposed to God's will, including the resistances to God in one's own community and in one's own heart, then the tendency to visit righteous wrath upon others need not arise.

3. Other theologians have proposed that a rethinking of the meaning of "retribution" can prevent excesses of retributive violence. (Don't need to get rid of it; just reinterpret it.) It need not be conceived as wrathful vengeance taking sadistic delight in the sufferings of the enemy. Biblical imagery that suggests such gloating need not be taken literally, but can be regarded as metaphoric expressions of the common human phenomenon of moral outrage. There is something morally repugnant about the prospect of vicious people taking pleasure in their victory over those they have harmed. In a moral universe, vice should not be rewarded; hurting others should not lead to the culprit's happiness and pleasure. Consequently, the language of retribution can be seen as an effort to redress the shocking reality that malefactors are often gleefully unrepentant. Given the fact that the fear of punishment seems to be the only factor that can produce regret at the lowest stage of moral development, retribution could be seen as a means to the end of the moral reformation. The perpetrator of the crime, not the victim, should feel the pang of remorse. In this view, retribution is an initial step toward the remediation of the offender; it is not the ecstasy of vengeance. Biblical passages that seem to revel in the woes of Israel's persecutors can be reinterpreted in this light.
4. A veritable host of responses have been generated by the criticisms of the traditional doctrines of the atonement and their alleged violent tendencies. Writers have argued in a variety of different and sometimes contradictory ways that the atonement need not lead to violence, and that, if properly understood, atonement theory actually undercuts human violence. Some have rejected Anselmic views, favoring a non-violent reconceptualization of the "Christus Victor" model. Authors like J. Denny Weaver, Susan Bond, and Anthony Bartlett continue to focus on the death of Jesus, but see it as God's way of breaking the cycle of retaliatory violence. For them, Jesus on the cross unmasks the powers of violence and evil. They are quick to point out that this interpretation of the significance of the cross is in accord with the pattern of Jesus' previous life. From the temptation narratives on, the gospels depict Jesus' consistent rejection of violence. In the story's climax Jesus is even willing to suffer death at the hands of his enemies rather than oppose them with force and thereby perpetuate the cycle of violence. In this view the resurrection is God's stamp of approval on Jesus' non-violent praxis and God's promise that this way of life shall ultimately prevail. In a paradoxical way, this interpretation is compatible with the ancient Christus Victor model of atonement, with the qualification that the means to Jesus' victory is the testimony of his non-violent acceptance of death. On the other hand, Anthony Bartlett revives Abelard's focus on Jesus'

death as a manifestation of God's love. The meaning of the crucifixion is God's bottomless response of self-giving love to the violent enmity of humanity. The events on Golgotha are God's unimaginable self-giving to God's foes. Christ's willingness to hand himself over to his enemies welcomes them and us into a radically new mode of life. Jesus' unconditional love invites a repetition in our hearts.

Other theologians attempt to revive more Anselmic views in ways that counter the accusations of violence. For example, William Placher has argued that because Christ has endured the destruction that disturbers of God's shalom should receive, we humans need not and should not set out to destroy sinners. David Wheeler has contended that a painful sacrifice is simply the inevitable cost of restoring any relationship that has been broken and damaged by one of the parties. Similarly, Shirley Guthrie has proposed that "western" views of the atonement struggle (sometimes ineptly) to articulate the conviction that God has identified with sinners and taken on the consequences of human estrangement. According to Catherine Pickstock, Anselmic views do not stress punishment, but rather focus on the pain which God must assume and share in order to restore fallen humanity. The atonement is not a prototype of child abuse, because all the persons of the Trinity are active in the Incarnation, suffering along with broken humanity.

5. The objection that Christian apocalyptic encourages human violence has also met its rebutors. Miroslav Volf suggests that apocalyptic literature actually authorizes our relinquishment of violence. We humans can and must give up retaliatory strategies because eschatologically it is God that has a monopoly on all violence; it is God, not we ourselves, who will take drastic measures to set all things right. Other theologians have maintained that the violence in apocalyptic passages can be read symbolically. Satan and the powers of evil are defeated by the Word, not by physical force. In fact, the power of violence is vanquished through the gentleness of the Lamb. In this view, apocalyptic talk about judgment is really talk about the dire consequences of rejecting God. The suffering is really not externally imposed by God, but is brought on by the sinner's own self. Apocalyptic rhetoric does not function to justify ideologies of violence, but to warn humanity that the imperative to live our lives in accord with God's purposes must be taken with utter seriousness.
6. Other theologians have entered the fray arguing against the notion that strong views of divine transcendence encourage violent attitudes. They object that God's "otherness" and "sovereignty" do not function as symbols of despotism. The language of providence does not suggest the arbitrary whims of a cosmic tyrant. Rather, such discourse indicates that there is a power that sustains us and orders our lives. We finite creatures are not the ground and source of our own existence. As Augustine, Calvin, Edwards, and Schleiermacher were well aware, down deep we humans feel a radical dependence on a power that supports our very being. That ontological relationship cannot be anything but asymmetrical. Because the language of transcendence points to our ontological dependence rather than to a

dictatorship of cosmic proportions, it need not have any nuance of coercion or violence. In fact, the observation that the transcendent God of Christianity is conceived as being Trinitarian further militates against the accusation of divine violence. Recent years have witnessed a surprising revival of theological reflection on the nature of the Trinity, most of it retrieving the doctrine of an “immanent” Trinity, the view that in God’s own self there exists differentiation within unity. This means that God is not defined as monolithic power, but as an intrinsic relationship of self-giving and joyful mutuality. Nothing could be farther from nuances of violent domination.

7. Finally, many theologians have puzzled over the contention that monotheism itself is essentially violent. They admit without apology the obvious fact that Christianity does indeed make truth claims, which suggest that opposed claims about reality must be false. This, however, is not a monopoly of monotheism; all world-views propose that their own way of construing reality is preferable to alternatives. All understandings of the nature and purpose of human life are gambles that one particular view rather than others will help human individuals navigate their way through life’s trials. The problem is not the fact that Christians have beliefs, but the way, in which the beliefs are held. Many of the “post-modern” orthodox and evangelical theologians recognize that Christian monotheism is one unverifiable wager among many contenders. Given the objective uncertainty of our faith, generosity must be extended to other perspectives. At the very least, violence cannot be employed to establish the hegemony of one’s own admittedly unprovable world-view.

So what does this overview of hotly contested pro’s and con’s teach us about Christianity and violence? For one thing, in all of the arguments and counter-arguments a repeated dynamic can be discerned. One side insists that certain words inevitably encourage violence, and the other side counters that they do not. Perhaps this recurrent pattern suggests that the problem is not the content of the words, but rather is their use. Metaphors and evocative language can mean a host of things depending on the specifics of their use. Maybe the potential for inciting violence does not reside in the words so much as in their employment. Any words, any language, can be commandeered in the interests of inflicting harm on others. A perfectly pure language, impervious to all sinful uses, is spoken by the angels in heaven. Perhaps we Christians should spend less time trying to invent a pristinely non-violent discourse and more time reforming our actual practices.

The critics do alert us to one crucial fact: violent metaphors can be dangerous, especially when literalized. Therefore the church must exercise constant vigilance when they are used to shape Christian lives. In fact, the church must attend much more carefully to its catechetical function, to make certain that its biblical and doctrinal vocabulary is not co-opted to support ideologies of hatred and aggression. We must be more diligent in communicating the genuinely Christian meanings of concepts like “atonement,” “transcendence,” and “retribution.” The problem is that our

churches in the U.S. back off from these themes. The stakes are exceedingly high, and we cannot afford to allow our cherished vocabulary to contribute to the proliferation of global animosity.

While we monitor the employments of our language, sensitive to the possibility of abuse, we must also rejoice that Christianity can draw from its rich treasury unique resources to oppose the current rise of violence. Christianity possesses a built-in prophylactic against violence, enshrined even in its seemingly violent rhetoric. The biblical, liturgical, and confessional language of God's wrath actually functions to expose the utterly heinous nature of non-love. Our heritage has returned to one central conviction over and over again, even when it had seemingly been forgotten: the one thing that God must hate and reject is hatred. With that core belief we can face a violent world with serenity, hope, and resolution.

Servant, Bridge-builder, Friend

Tribute to Harold Wilke

With some probability everybody will remember when she or he met Harold Wilke for the first time. For me it happened on February 27th, 1970 and the place was one of the huge waiting halls of John F. Kennedy airport. Within the exchange program between the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU), initiated by Harold and my predecessor Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, I had to lead a group of 12 (West) German pastors for a four-week-visit. At the airport I was the first to meet him, my hands outstretched. Only after a few seconds I realized that my partner had no arms and was unable to respond in the usual way. The same procedure was repeated with everybody else – there had been no possibility for me to give a signal to the others, coming to us in large intervals. But all of us were greeted with a big smile and felt at home immediately. We then went in several taxis to the George Washington Hotel in downtown Manhattan where again a great surprise came up when Harold took a dollar note out of his shoe and handed it over to the taxi driver.

On the next morning I visited Harold in his extremely modest and dark office, Park Avenue South, for the last arrangements of the program. Since he was responsible for the placement of pastors throughout the UCC, he knew congregations all over the country. He had had a clear idea whom to send to the EKU with the first exchange groups. Among our oldest friends from that time are outstanding people like Robert Moss, Ruben Huenemann, Ralph Ley and Kenneth Ziebell. Harold had never any difficulties to find hosts for the German pastors. And his bridge building reached far beyond the normal UCC congregations. Thus two of us were able to visit the Malcolm-X-University in

Chicago – a place at that time normally not particularly accessible for white people from Europe. And they also participated in a big event of “Operation Breadbasket” with Jesse Jackson as main speaker. Without the personal friendships Harold had developed, this would have been impossible.

My own route had to be changed: There were student riots at the university where I was to visit (as I recall it was Ohio State) and the local people did not want to take any risks for a visitor. This was Harold’s chance to send a person from Germany to his home congregation, and it was my great privilege to get to know Washington, Missouri. A town of about 20,000 inhabitants at the time but much smaller when Harold was born there on a farm on December 10, 1914, second of three sons – and the only one with a clearly visible disability. Visiting this place at the beginning of my second tour to the US – the first had been my year as an exchange student of the World Council of Churches in 1953/54 – I gained some insights which I have never forgotten.

First of all, I discovered how many people within the “continental” United States still live in small places like Washington, Missouri (or even smaller). Within this one week I got to know the mayor, two corn pipe factories, the Rotarians and the Kiwanis Club. I was invited to a meeting of the Ministerial Association and I visited nearly all the congregations. When we had our debriefing at the end of our tour (my companions had seen mainly big cities like St. Louis, San Francisco or Chicago,) I reminded them that their impressions did not reflect the entire country. After all, it is not only skyscrapers that form the country.

Much more important was the fact that I was able to meet people who had grown up with Harold or had even been around when he was born. I could ask them how the family coped with the fact that there was a boy with a serious problem. They quoted his mother: “Harold, you are a boy exactly like your brothers; you only have to work somewhat harder.” And this he did. I remember a story he liked to tell: A neighbor visits his mother in the morning when the little boy tries to get his shirt on without any help, and this takes an enormous amount of time and patience; then the neighbour asks the mother: “Why don’t you help him?” Her answer: “This is exactly what I am doing now!” - Harold was able to read and to write before he started school, but the director of the elementary school in Washington, Missouri refused to enroll this child; thus he had to start in a tiny country school. But when his excellent grades became known to the director he admitted his mistake and asked the parents to send Harold to his school. From this basis he started his training and his carrier, and he had no difficulties with his examinations, including his doctoral dissertation. With 25, he was ordained and started as a university chaplain, worked in a hospital, as a military chaplain and also in congregations in Missouri and Illinois.

Knowing this background made Harold’s entire life for me all the more exciting. I was privileged to see him in Berlin in the EKV headquarters or in New York or in his home in White Plains about every second year. Unforgettable was his first visit with our family on August 29th, 1970. Harold had impressed the older boys by looking with them at their stamp collection, carefully turning one stamp after another with his toes. In our guest book we discovered his “hand writing” – also done with his toes. After supper our youngest, Henning, just two years old, who had watched him intensively during the entire meal, remarked: “Poor Uncle Harold, he has no legs!”

Harold, coming from the Evangelical and Reformed Church, knew a lot about the European roots of the United Church of Christ. He also spoke German, and thus it was no surprise that when soon after the foundation of the UCC in 1957 he was called to serve in

the central administration, part of his portfolio within the Council for Church and Ministry was the contact to the EKV. He got to know the intricacies of the East/West tensions and knew immediately that the church ties between Christians on both sides of the Iron Curtain had to be strengthened. Thus he paid regular visits to the area at that time known as the German Democratic Republic. On the basis of his intensive work with the EKV, the declaration of full communion (“Kirchengemeinschaft”) between the UCC and the EKV (in that period still in two regions) in 1980/81 was a logical consequence.

The name of Harold Wilke had become well known in Germany also for his many services as the attorney of people with disabilities. The consequences of using thalidomide by pregnant mothers had reached West Germany in the early sixties. Soon afterwards the government invited Harold for four months to assist parents, doctors, nurses and teachers in how to work with those children and how to help them to live a normal life for which he himself was the best example. He was also able to establish contacts to medical professors at Heidelberg University and in many diaconal institutions. For this unusual service Harold was bestowed with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic.

When Harold had become 60 years old, the administration of the UCC was to be reorganized. He used this occasion to retire from his main job in order to spend the remaining years working with people who faced great challenges. Through his appointment as honorary chief of all Protestant chaplains he had discovered that there were not just those born with disabling conditions but also wounded war veterans (he had travelled to Vietnam!) and men, women and children who had lost limbs through accidents. We have learned a great deal through his ongoing activities and initiatives. First of all, we learned we should not define this huge group by using the term “handicapped”, but they and we should discover “people with special abilities”. And instead of describing us as healthy, we should rather think of us as TAB’s, temporary able-bodied. Harold knew that he needed a great number of people to change the attitudes everywhere and thus he founded “The Healing Community” as a kind of co-ordination center. In this great coalition he approached politicians, city planners and architects. He also convinced many church authorities that no public building, no church, mosque or synagogue should be built without access for people with wheel chairs. Through his lobbying President George H. W. Bush, signed a law in 1990 in the White House which prohibits the discrimination of people with handicaps (“The Americans with Disabilities Act”). Harold spoke a prayer on that occasion.

He never left any doubt that his activities on behalf of this group of human beings was rooted in his Christian faith. Even when he was invited by governments in China or Russia he made it clear what - or rather who - motivated him. It was no surprise that the World Council of Churches also made use of this very special man. Together with Dr. Peggy Way he paved a path so that the Assemblies of the World Council would include the needs of people deprived of certain abilities: The unity of the church is at stake when they are excluded. No congregation, he said over and over again, is complete unless there are people with disabilities and handicaps in our services.

In my notes I discovered that I visited the Wilke’s in White Plains in September 1987. During an earlier visit he had driven me in his car from his home to a congregation in Pennsylvania – a car which had the steering wheel on the floor. This time John, one of the five sons, picked me up at the train station. In the old house Harold was happy to light the fire place and – not to be forgotten – light his pipe. And then we watched television. Without any announcement we suddenly saw a young man, having no arms, and playing his guitar before the Pope with his feet. When the piece was finished, the Pope got up

from his chair and embraced the player. At the same time Harold had got up, tears in his eyes, and shouting “Hallelujah”.

Harold Wilke was a man with very many special abilities. On February 25, 2003, he died in Claremont, California, where he had lived with his wife Margareth (Peggy) for about 15 years. Nobody from the EKU could be present when in April a service of thanksgiving took place. But there is a huge group of people in my country who remember Harold, the servant of our common Lord, the bridge-builder and the friend. We give thanks to God that “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrew 12:1).

Reinhard Groscurth

A Brief Report on the Closing Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU)

April 11-12, 2003
Johannesstift, Berlin

by
Frederick R. Trost

The final gathering of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU) took place at the Johannesstift in Berlin on April 11-12, 2003. Some of you know the Johannesstift, founded by Johann Hinrich Wichern in 1858 as a place where the poor, the sick, prisoners and children might receive assistance, “not merely with words or phrases or gestures, but rather in deed and in truth.” The diakonic ministries of the Johannesstift remain true to this vocation until this day. And so it was a very appropriate setting in which the 88 delegates and several ecumenical guests and visitors met.

You may remember that some of the earliest pastors and many of the early members of what later became the Evangelical Synod of North America belonged to one or another of the “united” churches that formed the Church of the Prussian Union, founded October 30, 1817 through the insistence of King Friedrich Wilhelm III, known as “a man of peace.” He was a person of great intelligence, who had studied the liturgy of the Church carefully and instituted reforms along the lines of the Lutheran “mass.” But he did not impose this liturgy or the “Agende” on his subjects, but rather invited them to use it, ... as an example of faithful liturgy, not as a command. This freedom has been a mark of the EKU since its inception 186 years ago, and was a gift brought to the United States by those who founded the first Evangelical congregations on the western frontier and elsewhere. Yes, “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

The EKU is the Church of some of the great figures in German Protestantism, including Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh in the 19th century, and in more recent time Martin Niemoeller, Paul Schneider, Jochen Klepper, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Katherina Staritz, Heinrich Gruber, Senta Maria Klatt, Kurt Scharf, Peter Baier, Heino Falcke and many others.

It was from the heart of the EKU in the Rhineland that emerged the important “Barmen Declaration” of 1934, with the leadership of Karl Barth. From this tradition came, in 1987, the document “Confessing for Peace” (introduced to the UCC in 1989) with its vital and prophetic words, uttered from behind “the Wall”: “We confess that God’s love extends to all people without distinction. Particularly, God stands with the weak and the oppressed. This implies: no person and no state may place its own security and freedom above that of others and hold people hostage to assure its own freedom and security. The spirit of deterrence is opposed to the spirit of God...As those who confess God as Lord, we are challenged to take clear steps showing that our faith is opposed to the use, possession and production of the means of mass destruction. Our practical steps must be as manifold and concrete as the threat to the survival of humankind is manifold and concrete...”

+

The Synod opened at 4 p.m. on April 11th, appropriately, with one of the great hymns of the Evangelical Church, “Wohl denen, die da wandeln vor Gott in Heiligkeit.” (“It is well unto them that appear before Gott in humility and holiness.”) Following the Trinitarian ascription, Psalm 43 was read. And then, in three voices, the beautiful hymn “Sende dein Licht und deine Wahrheit” (“Send Thy Light and Thy Truth”). It is fascinating (and significant) to me that the first “order of business” was the reading of the names of those related to the Synod who had been called from this life to life in the “Church Triumphant” during the past year. Interesting too was the fact that each delegate then had to answer “present” as the roll was taken of the representatives of the seven regional churches composing the EKU and also the theological faculties. The various guests, including my wife Louise and I, were then introduced and asked to stand. Several reports were given and two addresses, one by Prases Manfred Sorg of Westphalia, the chr. of the Council of the EKU, the other by Wilhelm Huffmeier, the Prases of the Kirchenkanzlei in Berlin. I thought both addresses quite moving, with reference to the fact that this gathering represented the final meeting of the Synod of the EKU since the formation of the “union” of 1817,... “an honorable farewell,” to a church that “has been called in repentance and gratitude to believe in the grace of God throughout its history, even in its dark chapters.” A note of hope was sounded as the EKU looks forward to the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) within the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) later this year. “The future has a history,” Manfred Sorg proclaimed “and through the door of this history we enter the future. We dare not forget from whence we have come, as we discover new perspectives and encounter new challenges,... and as we remember those who have prepared the way... The new UEK understands itself as carried into the future by the Shepherd who leads it to green pastures and beside the still waters, recognizing that each of the churches has its own heritage, its traditions and needs” that each carries with it into the new union.

Wilhelm Huffmeier spoke eloquently in his address of the gifts the EKU carries into the new UEK and of the challenges and opportunities that are ahead. He spoke of liturgy and of theology, of ecumenicity (including Kirchengemeinschaft with the UCC in the U.S.A. and the United Church of Canada, and an eagerness to build upon the good foundation that has been laid), of research, of teaching, of church law, and of responsibilities for theological education and of course, of finances. He spoke with feeling and a special fondness for those who have offered guidance to the life of the EKU from the Kirchenkanzlei in the Jebenstrasse, where so many of us have visited over the years, and of the relationship between the EKU in the west and the EKU in the east and how, in the new

UEK as well as the EKD, each is being summoned to carry the others' burdens, "and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

There followed the singing of a hymn ("Vertraut den neuen Wegen, auf die der Herr uns weist," written in 1989 by Klaus Peter Hertzsch to the wonderful melody of "Lob Gott getrost mit Singen." Then Wilhelm Huffmeier responded to questions from the delegates related to his report, including a word of appreciation from Anhalt for the support the EKU has given to the "eastern churches." A question was raised about the preaching seminaries at Wittenberg (dating from 1817) and in Berlin-Brandenburg and the likelihood that one of these (probably Berlin-Brandenburg) will be closed because of financial pressures. Another comment reflected gratitude for the theological thinking that took place in the EKU during the forty years of the former German Democratic Republic. There was a comment expressing the hope that the "theological responsibility" expressed in the life of the EKU will be carried on in the UEK. Prases Huffmeier gave assurances that the Church's commitment to theological work will not diminish. A report on nominations was offered, the establishment of an "EKU Foundation," and a report from the Church's Department of Legal Affairs, by our friend Dr. Rohde. The afternoon closed with the singing of the hymn "Ja, ich will euch tragen bis zum Alter hin" ("Yes, I shall carry you even to your old age", based on Isaiah 46:3-4, and with prayer.

The evening session was informal and included three "Tischreden," one by Manfred Kock, the Prases of the EKD, one by the representative of the Lutheran Church in Mecklenburg, and one by me. This was, of course a delight. During the course of things, I presented Wilhelm Huffmeier a large blue candle (the color of theology!) as a gift from the UCC and to Manfred Kock I gave a lovely metal figure of an oboist playing music, drawing attention to our gratitude in the UCC for his "making music," i.e. for his consistent witness for peace and justice amidst the present chaos. These gifts were gratefully received. The conversation went on alongside many bottles of very good wine until nearly midnight.

The next morning, April 12, everyone was on time as the Synod gathered in its closing session, which opened with the hymn "All Morgen ist ganz frisch und neu." (Every Morning is so fresh and new") to a lovely melody by Johann Walter, dating from 1541. Various proposals from committees that had been presented the previous day were received and approved. Nikolaus Schneider, who beautifully chaired the sessions of the Synod, offered moving remarks as the Synod drew to a close, giving thanks for those who had gathered, and for the competence and good spirit of the delegates. He spoke of the tears of farewell, but also of the joy "of a broader fellowship" envisioned in the formation of the UEK. Thanks were also given for "the deepening of Protestantism across Europe" and for "the theological work that has been a mark of the EKU." "We shall grow and be enriched in time to come on the way to a renewed Evangelical Church in Germany." We sang a beautiful hymn... "Komm, Herr, segne uns" ("Come, Lord, bless us") as the Synod closed and we gathered for the Eucharist, which began with another lovely hymn "Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund" ("I sing to Thee with heart and voice"). Throughout the liturgy, we were accompanied by beautiful piano playing and joyful singing. A text from Mark 10 was read... "Es ging zu ihm Jakobus und Johannes..." and after singing the hymn "Wir glauben Gott im höchsten Thron," with text by Rudolf Alexander Schroder, the gospel was proclaimed in a sermon by Wilhelm Huffmeier in which he spoke of the hopes and struggles of the Church, of the "Confessing Church" and its witness, and of clinging to Christ in the days of the east-

west conflicts, reminding us all that the light and truth of God remains... forever. This sermon was followed by the joyous hymn (often sung during the time of the Confessing Church) "In dir ist Freude" ("In Thee is gladness") The elements of bread and wine were passed among the delegates and visitors to piano music, played so sensitively, of J. S. Bach. I was moved by the fact that the Kirchendiener (church sexton, responsible for the communion elements) stood at the communion table throughout the liturgy, preparing everything, while the celebrants in their black robes and "Beffchen" (Geneva tabs) moved with the bread and cup among the delegates. We passed the elements to one another saying "Christi Leib fur dich gebrochen... Christi Blut fur dich gegossen." Following the "Prayer of Thanksgiving," we sang the hymn of Friedrich Spitta, "Im Frieden dein, o Herre mein, lass ziehn mich meine Strassen." The benediction was offered and then, once again in three voices the delegates sang by heart "Sende dein Licht und deine Wahrheit," based on Psalm 43, which had accompanied us throughout the Synod. We shared the noon day meal and the delegates departed for home.

It was a great joy and privilege to be asked to represent the UCC at this quiet and yet moving closing Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union. It is one of those "moments" in Church life one remembers for a lifetime. Louise and I experienced joy upon joy at the Johannesstift and these joys were enhanced on Saturday afternoon and evening when we had an opportunity to travel across Berlin with Dr. Christa Gregel, the former ecumenical officer of the EKU-East, now serving on the ecumenical staff (with special responsibilities for the Middle East) at the headquarters of the EKD in Hannover. (She wanted to be remembered to all of you.) We took the S-Bahn from Bahnhof Zoo past the Reichstag to Friedrichstrasse and then on to the "Palace of Tears" which some of you will recall as the place where, in former times, people (who were allowed!) would leave the east for the west. We walked across the old bridge to the Oranienburgerstrasse and on to Auguststrasse 80, the site of so many fascinating and important discussions during the "DDR Zeit." The Oranienburger synagogue nearby, badly damaged in the fires of Kristallnacht in 1938, has been completely rebuilt and is now a museum and memorial. There is a growing Jewish presence in the old neighborhood, which in some ways looks much as it did when some of us were there more than a quarter century ago.

We returned from Berlin to the U.S. on Palm Sunday, grateful for friendships renewed, for the precious gift of faith, and for the unity of Christ's Church.

In Memoriam

Ruben Huenemann, 1909 – 2003

Friends of “Kirchengemeinschaft” in the United States and around the world give thanks to God in Christ for Dr. Ruben Huenemann who was called from this life to the “ecclesia triumphans” on December 23, 2003.

Ruben Huenemann was a pastor and teacher who loved the Church and was profoundly committed to its ministry. Following service in the parish, he became founding president of United Theological Seminary in New Brighton, Minnesota and later was Minister of the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ. As President Wilson Yates of UTS has written, he loved to “tell stories of how (the) seminary rose from the earth of farmland to become an important institution of theological education. He took great delight in the new chapel and gave the baptismal font in honor and memory of Clara, his wife, who died in 1999... He was a quick-witted ‘German’ presence of authority with a touch of severity—who loved to sing... He was a driving, determined figure who sought the justice of God and an unwavering commitment to be about the work of God.”

Dr. Huenemann is remembered in the former Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU) as a faithful embodiment of “Kirchengemeinschaft.” Together with Ferdinand Schlingensiepen of the EKU, he helped prepare the way for “Full Communion” and he was a frequent visitor to the Kirchenkanzlei at Jebenstrasse 3 in Berlin, never failing to visit on various journeys to Europe over the years. Shortly before his death, he placed a phone call from his hospital bed in Oregon to Dr. Reinhard Groscurth, now living in retirement in Bremen, stating simply that he wanted to say... “Auf Wiedersehen.” So it was with Ruben for whom friendship and companionship with people near and far away was a way of being true to one’s baptism and to one’s faith. As Wilson Yates has said... “His is a life to be remembered and to be celebrated by us all...”

+

“O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine,
Alleluia! Alleluia!”

The UCC-EKU Working Group, 2003-2004

Frederick Trost, Chr. and Convener, Middleton, Wisconsin
Mark Burrows, Vice Chr. and Secretary, Newton Centre, Massachusetts
Richard Edens, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Beth Ernest, Caledonia, Michigan
Robert Hunsicker, Lancaster, Pennsylvania (consultant)
Randall Hyvonen, Spokane, Washington
Vilma M. Machin-Vazquez, Cleveland, Ohio
F. Russell Mitman, Collegeville, Pennsylvania
Richard Olmsted, Acton, Massachusetts
Stephen Patterson, Webster Groves, Missouri
Tobias Schlingensiepen, Topeka, Kansas
Bryan Sickbert, Cleveland, Ohio
Lydia Veliko, Cleveland, Ohio

Peter Makari, Area Executive, Middle East and Europe Office, WCM-UCC,
Common Global Ministries Office, Cleveland, Ohio (staff to the
Working Group)

Credo

I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that War is Murder. I believe that armies and navies are at bottom the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong, and I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that struggle. I believe in Liberty for all men and women: the space to stretch their arms and their souls, the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine, and ride on the railroads, uncursed by color; thinking, dreaming, working as they will in a kingdom of beauty and love. I believe in the Training of Children, black even as white; the leading out of little souls into the green pastures and beside the still waters, not for self or peace, but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth; lest we forget,... Finally, I believe in Patience—patience with the weakness of the Weak and the strength of the Strong, the prejudice of the Ignorant and the ignorance of the Blind; patience with the tardy triumph of Joy and the mad chastening of Sorrow; patience with God.

W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963)

**These materials have been prepared at the
Mission House Center, Lakeland College.**

Please notify us of address changes by contacting:

**Colleen Drucek
Lakeland College**

PO Box 359

Sheboygan WI 53082-0359

or

e-mail your information to:

drucekck@lakeland.edu

**UCC
E WORKING GROUP
K**

**Mission House Center
Lakeland College
PO Box 359
Sheboygan, WI 53082-0359**