

# Nothing's Lost. Or?

Books are the memory of humankind. An Armenian legend recounts that when the Mongols seized the ancient monastery of Goshavank the monks asked them to take the treasury, but to spare the books.

## Tripartite Narratives

The presented book focuses on three important phenomena that have been attracting increasing attention since the late XIX<sup>th</sup> century – the Central European identity, ecological thought and the ecumenical movement. However, all the three narratives have a long prehistory, as some of the collected articles explain. They are stories of significant developments in human thought, behaviour and attitudes that have affected whole human societies, such as churches or states, and even the natural environment of the human race.

Ecology, ecumenism and regional identity have been dealt with in books of different nature and scope. This book tries to combine these three topics as three fields of dialogue. The dialogue between states, countries and regions (Central Europe); the dialogue between Christian churches and ecclesial communities (ecumenism) and the dialogue between humans and the rest of the biosphere (ecology).

The methodology of dialogue is the 'red thread' connecting the articles of this book. Central European intellectuals as well as intellectuals from other parts of Europe examine in their contributions the possibilities, successes and failures of the dialogical paradigm in ecology, ecumenism and history with a special focus on the region of Central Europe.

The goal of these three dialogues is the critical evaluation of the wrongdoings and failures of our dialogical behaviour. The crisis of our approach to nature is well known in the post-industrial age. The unhappy fragmentation of our region and our constantly unfortunate choice for emotional or cultural isolation from each other is also a phenomenon which we encounter after the severe wounds of the two world wars. Finally, the dismembered body of the Christian Church is a pain which casts a shadow even to our relationship with God. We believe that deep-dialogue would lead to understanding, appreciation, and finally, unity.

### **Fourfold Structure**

The title of the book, *A Pentatonic Landscape*, refers to the five countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) participating in our Central European ecumenical youth co-operation; and also to its specific topic, ecology. Our region is a definite landscape in the European continent, and we aimed at bringing a harmonious, consonant, even concordant melody to this vicinity by our present anthology.

The first part (Ecology and Environment) of the present book deals with the findings of our recent Ecology Conference. We base our approach on Christian theology, being ourselves from different Christian denominations (*Learning to Care: Christianity and Ecology*). Orthodox environmental thought and eco-feminism get their special focus in this chapter.

This ground enables us to face various challenges of eco-management, and to specify some of the actual concerns and to define viable ways for the future, like renewable energies or permaculture (*Managing to Live: The Culture of Environment*).

In the second part (Central Europe and Ecumenism), we continue what we touched upon during our Pannonhalma Conference: we try to trace our common roots as a distinct region within the continent. Our present is built on our stormy history, which is our shared tradition to choose means to deconstruct our region from (*Positive Stories: Past and Present in Central Europe*). Some of the previous ideas for Central European confederations are also examined, and this chapter deals with one of the crucial questions of our region, the role of minorities.

Finally, as the book began with Christianity, it also concludes with it (*The Option of Dialogue: Ecumenism in Central Europe*). An effort is made to explain the methodology of dialogue as developed in the ecumenical movement. Certain aspects of church history, most notably the age of Reformation in our part of Europe, and Czech ecumenism receives a special attention.

### **Pentatonic Co-operation**

Surprisingly enough, already in the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century the Central European youth gatherings played a very important role in large-scale ecumenism (including Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions) and in the ministry of post-war reconciliation. The European Student Relief, founded in 1920 by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF, 1895), organised an important conference in 1921 (less than one year after the Versailles Settlement) in Turnov (then Czechoslovakia).

A year later (1922) this was repeated in Hungary, where there were

Polish, Czech, Slovak, Magyar, Romanian, Yugoslav and even German students participating. There were not only Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants, but also Jewish, Muslim and non-affiliated students.

The other miraculous adventures at that time were the so-called Eastern and Southern European Leaders' Conferences, organised also by WSCF. In the twenties, for seven conferences, every year they brought together young Poles, Czechs, Magyars, Austrians, Slovaks, and also Romanians and students of Yugoslavia, or even Bulgarians and Greeks, the lecturers coming in an equal number from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. It was only the shadow of the coming war which prevented these meetings from continuation.

This is the heritage which we aim at reconstructing and also reshaping with our co-operation. As we phrased it in our website ([www.visegrad.szm.com](http://www.visegrad.szm.com)), the Central European Subregion (established in 2001) is an intercultural and ecumenical youth co-operation that builds up paradigms of peace and reconciliation through dialogue, and strengthens Central European identity before and after joining the European Union by mutual education, co-operation and cultural exchange.

The activities of our co-operation encompass at least two conferences a year, in rotation among the five member countries. Most of the articles in this book are closely related to the contributions presented in our first conference in the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute (BGÖI) in the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma, Hungary (February 2002) and in our second conference in the Orthodox Academy in Vilémov u Litovle, Czech Republic (July 2002).

The focal point of the Pannonhalma Conference was the modern history of Central Europe, the Central European identity and its embodiment, as well as ideas connected with the geographical, geopolitical and cultural definitions of Central Europe. Common features of ecumenical dialogue and international dialogue were analysed in search for potential platforms of mutual methodological enrichment.

The central topic of the Vilémov Conference was ecology in its wide range of theoretical and practical, problematic and visionary forms, its place and demands in Central Europe and its connection with ecumenical Christian responsibility and action. Some of the presented articles continue the line of thought and attempt to trace the trajectory of the dialogue between the development of Christian ethics and modern ecological concerns.

## Thousands of Thanks

To publish an anthology, one needs a bigger team of committed contributors. Many thanks first of all to the authors; then to the art editor, SZALAY Miklós (from Budapest); to our copy editor, Kate WILSON; and to the translators: first of all Lena PHILIPPOVÁ (Czech), then Doris HOFSTÖTTER and Katharina IGENBERGS (German), Vojtech HUDEC (Slovak), Magda MULARCZYK (Polish) and OROVA Csaba (Magyar). Solvej GASSEHOLM, our beloved intern from Denmark, being based in Prague, was of great help for the functioning of our Subregion, as well as Jiří SIBRT, the other main organiser of the Vilemov Conference.

We remain thankful to the Benedictine Archabbot VÁRSZEGI Asztrik, the director of the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute (BGÖI) and to Roman JURIGA, the director of the Orthodox Academy in Vilemov, for their hospitality and support. We also remain grateful for the support of the Dominican province of Slovakia and its provincial Konštanc Miroslav ADAM.

We are grateful to our donors: the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), the Youth Program of the European Union, the World Student Christian Federation Europe Region (WSCF-E) and the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute, Pannonhalma (BGÖI).

Finally, we thank the artist, who provided the illustrations for the book by scanning her various textile objects: HOLLÓ Katalin from Budapest, Hungary, a textile designer. As the organic forms cannot be built up without a geometric frame, her objects have a geometric structure as well. The matter, in this case the textile, provides an opportunity to this structure to behave like an organic form, like a living organism. An object lives when it is being used, e.g. as a lamp – and this refers back to the living beings, which are also sustained by the Light.

Peter ŠAJDA – NAGYPÁL Szabolcs