



Moving out of the Center



*Robert Hunt, Director of
Global Theological Education*

A good friend of mine related a story from his navy days about an experience we all need to have. He was a young officer on a training exercise in Lake Superior. On the bridge was a circular map with concentric circles, like a target. On this map his boat was at the center of the target. His job was to use all the information he had available to place every other boat in the fleet on the map. That way he and his captain could see where every boat was located relative to their own boat. My friend's epiphany came when he realized that every other boat in the fleet had an identical map. Except that on those maps it was those boats, not his, that were at the center. And that was not a bad thing. Out on the ocean there is no obvious center around which everything revolves. As long as the boats were in constant communication, and each knew its position relative to the others, the fleet could maneuver in sophisticated and useful ways. They did not need a single center to their universe. Indeed, such a single center would have been problematic in the real world. After all, not only is the fleet moving, but sometimes boats sink—or go far astray.

There is a lesson for Christians here, one that we learn through experiencing other cultures and societies. We naturally chart the location of others relative to ourselves, and that is useful and indeed necessary. But it is equally useful to realize that we are not the center of their different universes. Indeed, our world, culturally and historically,

is much like an ocean that has no obvious center. In order to make our way across it is often less important to place ourselves in relation to some fixed point than in relation to our neighbors. And that means both constant communication and recognizing that every society has a different center around which it organizes its intercultural relations. Only that will prevent us from suffering constant collisions, or losing track of each other entirely.

And what about reaching our final destination? It is interesting to me that the Bible tells us that all humanity will reach it together, born on currents of God's providence and blown by God's Spirit. Perhaps the best way to chart our course is, therefore to stay close to our neighbors. After all, it is *to* them and *for* them that Christ sends us sailing at all.

Notes from the 2007 Immersion Experiences

In January and March of 2007 more than 35 Perkins students participated in immersion courses. These are their reports on what these experiences have meant.

Sue Washington, first year student

"My journey to S.E. Asia allowed me to see conditions (political, religious, social) of several ethnic and cultural groups of people living together, worshipping together and separately, and struggling with a political system that threatens the freedom of some. It seems that in the midst of God's plan it is difficult to realize that it is his providential workings that place us in different positive or negative situations. Growing up in the U.S.A. during a time when the African American race was 'the'

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2007 Immersions (Continued)

minority race, enabled me to look at the situation in S.E. Asia and realize the potential for progress and yet feel the oppression and threat of further injustice to the poor and oppressed. From the seminary and Methodist schools in Seremban and Singapore to the Islamic Mosques, Buddhist and Hindu temples, people live daily in the confidence of their gods' protection. Like the rise and fall of the tide surrounding S.E. Asia, the peace and unrest may rise and fall often before the final ebb. I felt God's presence in S.E. Asia through the people (some are still labeled Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist etc..) and God's beautiful landscape."

(Shortly after offering this article Mrs. Washington passed away unexpectedly. All those who traveled with her grieve along with her family for the loss of a good friend and companion.)

Irene Jackson, second year M.Div

"The immersion experience in Germany was invaluable in giving me the opportunity to see what other Christians are doing to share the gospel with those around them, in a context with many differences from mine, but some similarities, and take away ideas that challenged my theology. It was wonderful to talk to some of the professors whose books we had read and question them about what they meant in parts of their books. We experienced fellowship with German Christians in two worship services during which we shared communion. We were graciously received in several homes. We talked with younger professors and older professors, clients of a rehabilitation center for substance abusers, a high school history teacher, museum guides and our bus drivers. Everyone we talked with was gracious and welcoming and seemed willing to give their honest opinions about their concerns about Germany, and their concerns about the United States. Those who talked about the church and German society, expressed the view that the church and Christians had a duty with or through the government to take care of those in society who

are unable to take care of themselves whether they are unemployed, poor, suffering from substance abuse, or are otherwise in some category of need. Everyone talked about the duty of Christians and the church to be vigilant to maintain freedom in their country, to be alert for any trend toward fascism. I felt challenged to look at my country, my church and myself in a new way. This is what I have now been thinking that we should be doing more of in the United States, The United Methodist Church, and that I should be doing more of personally in my own circle of influence.



The Taizé community is an ecumenical monastic group founded in the wake of the second world war to bring spiritual renewal to European churches. Since then the simple, contemplative worship that it offers to people of all denominations has spread to become source of spiritual enrichment and nourishment for Christians around the world. Students visiting the Taizé community worship and work together in a dozen languages, joining with Christians around the world in adoration of Jesus Christ.

Wendy Curran, second year M.Div.

The Taizé pilgrimage was door-opening for me. While it was wonderful being in community from people all over the world and discussing the Bible and our lives with them, by far the most meaningful component of the experience to me was 'being still.' The simplicity of the prayer services, the simple life we led while at the Community, and the slower, more intentional pace we all experienced transformed me from an overcommitted, schedule-driven person into one who could not get enough of still, silent prayer. The beauty of Taizé and the ways in which the Brothers lived their lives in joy, simplicity and mercy combined to make this a most memorable experience

Renewing Hope through Mission

Hearts and Minds for Mission,
October 16th, 2007

Both current volunteers in mission and all those interested in a deeper understanding of mission are invited to “Hearts and Minds for Mission: An Intensive Seminar for Lay Mission Volunteers.” The seminar will be held on October 13, 2007 at First United Methodist Church, Richardson, Texas. It will be offered by the Global Theological Education Program at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.

Faculty members from the Perkins School of theology will offer workshops exploring in-depth how the scriptures speak of hope for the nations, how volunteers in mission can join in renewing the hope of communities trapped in structures of poverty and injustice, and how volunteers in mission can be part of the renewal of their own congregations.

Workshops will include:

- Dr. Rich Nelson: Professor of Old Testament: *Isaiah's Hope for the Nations*
- Dr. Rebecca Miles: *Hope and Theology for our Time*
- Dr. Jeannie Stevenson-Moessner: Associate Professor of Pastoral Care: *Self-Care for Volunteers in Mission*
- Dr. Robert Hunt: Director of Global Theological Education: *Renewing the Local Congregation Through Mission*
- *Additional workshops in New Testament Visions of Mission and Hope,*

Registration information is available at www.smu.edu/globaltheology.

The cost will be \$40.00/person, including lunch.

Inter-Cultural Immersion Courses for 2008.

In 2008 the GTE Program will continue to expand its range of cross-cultural immersion programs for students, and will have an immersion in China especially for laypersons and working pastors.

January Term

- *South Africa* - An immersion in African Christianity—Theology and Ministry: led by Drs. Evelyn Parker and Joerg Rieger.
- *Palestinian Territories and Israel* - Dar al-Kalima Academy—The Palestinian Christian Context and Theology: led by Dr. Valerie Karras.
- *Mexico City* - John Wesley in the Latin American Context - led by Dr. Ted Campbell.

Spring Break

- *El Salvador* - led by Dr. Hal Recinos

Summer

- *China* (June 9th to June 24th) - An immersion in Chinese Christian culture and history. *Designed especially for both students and laypersons this course will focus on the history of Christianity in China* and will be led by Dr. Robert Hunt. (3 credit hours. Approximately \$3900.00)

Making Inter-cultural Immersions available to every student.

In 2007 Perkins School of Theology has offered more than \$20,000 in travel stipends to 30 - plus students participating in immersion courses. Only a travel stipend makes it possible for these students to participate in a inter-cultural immersion program.

The Global Theological Education Fund is sustained by the generous donations of individuals, Sunday School classes, and churches that understand the value and necessity of intercultural experience for the leadership of a church in mission. Your contributions will be most welcome, and will make it possible for students called to ministry and mission to receive the best possible training.

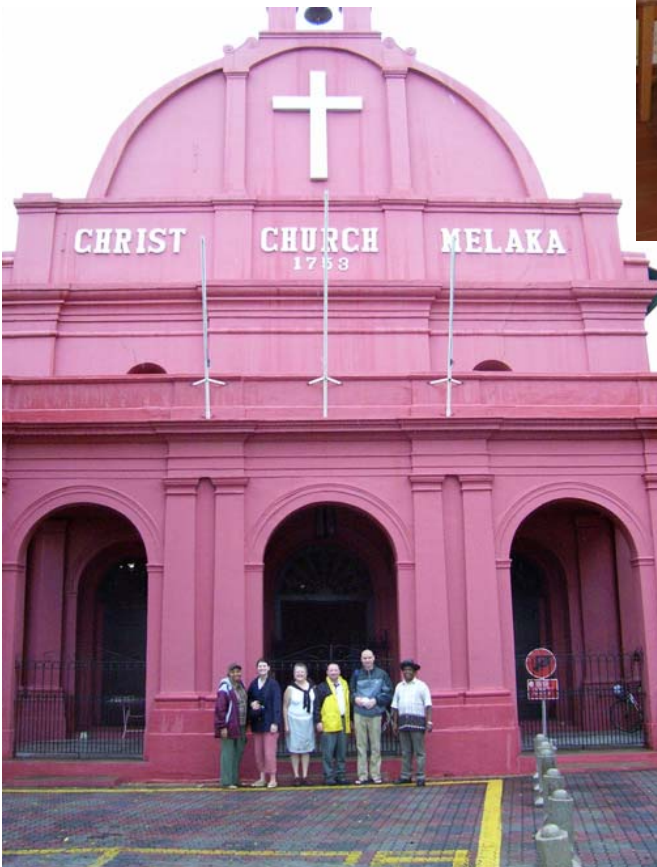
Contributions should be mailed to Perkins Office of Development. Checks should be made out to *Perkins School of Theology GTE Program*.

Inter-Cultural Immersions 2007



“God has not left himself without a witness: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” Acts 14:17

- *Top: Sternsängern (Christmas carolers) encountered by Perkins students in Heidelberg, Germany.*
- *Right: Perkins Students with Brother Pedro at Taize, France.*
- *Below: Perkins Students with Dr. Batumalai, pastor of the historic Christ Church of Malacca.*



***Global Theological Education:
Preparing pastors for local ministry
in a global context***

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