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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Hong-Eyul Hwang
Publisher	Globethics.net
Rights	Creative Commons Copyright (CC 2.5)
Download date	2026-07-04 23:03:28
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/156825

INTRODUCTION INTO THE OIKOS THEOLOGY MOVEMENT IN SOUTH KOREA

Hong-Eyul Hwang

15.1 The Oikotree Movement

The Oikotree Movement is a movement of movements striving for justice in the economy and the earth in the spirit of Accra confession and the AGAPE call. It has been initiated and sponsored by the WCC, CWM and WCRC. The Oikos Theology Movement in Korea is part of the Oikotree Movement.

About 10 theological professors got together in 2009 around their shared realization that current theological education was inadequate to cope with the challenges of the economic crisis, the ecological crisis, the spiritual crisis and the civilizational crisis.

The Oikos Theology Movement, responding to God's will in the face of these multifold crises that currently challenge the whole earth community, seeks to contribute to the creation of a life-promoting civilization, through the construction of alternative theological education. It is an attempt to construct a network of professors and pastors who are engaged in the issues of life, justice, peace and ecumenism in Korea, and to nurture a younger generation who are

committed to an ecumenical ministry for life, justice, and peace, through the Oikos School. The Oikos School will be presented below in more detail as practical experience.²²⁹



The three circles of the Oikos Korea symbol imply human beings, nature (the Creation), and God. Each circle, which is not closed, signifies the interrelation, interaction, and communication among humans, nature, and God. God is embracing the creation, and we human beings belong to the nature. These three circles also connote the triune God: God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.

15.2 The Oikos School

The Oikos Theology Movement in Korea decided to achieve its goal through the annual operation of an Oikos Summer School. The Oikos Summer School seeks to develop an alternative theological education system that responds actively to the issues faced by the whole life-community. It is an educational community comprising professors and pastors who agree with the general goal of the Oikos Theology Movement in Korea, and students who join in its programs. Not only professors but also students are deeply involved in the process of planning and carrying out the school programs. The program of the Oikos Summer School consists of Bible reflections and meditations, lectures by professors and/or guest speakers, theme presentations by students, panel/group discussions, singing and dancing for expressing the wholeness of body and soul, and in the sharing of life-giving meals. At the beginning, the program was prepared by the professors. Since the

²²⁹ for more information on the practical ways in which an Oikos Theological School is done see the video: www.youtube.com/watch?V=Ww9CEursj5c

formation of the Student Facilitation Group, the program has been organized jointly by this group and the professors.

From 2010 on, we have held the Oikos Summer School every August; and in addition, we held an Oikos Winter School in 2011 and 2012. In 2013, the students and professors of the Oikos School took a peace trip to Nagasaki, Japan, one of the two cities destroyed by the atomic bombings of 1945. The peace trip was led by a specialist in peace education, Rev. Sang-Eyoul Oh.

The objectives of the Oikos School from 2010 to 2015 were

- 1) To analyze the present situation of the Korean churches and theology in relation to the ecumenical movement.
- 2) To see and assess the life-destroying aspects of current world civilization, and to understand the ecumenical efforts to promote life in fullness, justice and peace, in relation to the WCC Busan Assembly theme.
- 3) To explore ways of doing theology for action on the issues of life, justice and peace for the world, from the perspectives of the divided Korean peninsula, Asia, the global village and the cosmic community.

15.3 Oikos Summer Schools

15.3.1 2010 Summer School

In 2010 the Summer School was held from Wednesday August 18 to Friday August 20, at Hanmaeum Community in Changseong, Korea. Its theme was “With Soil, With Rivers, With God, and With Us: Doing Theology with Soil and Water!” 12 professors and 80 students from seven universities and seminaries, mainly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, participated in this Summer School. The theme was chosen in response to the government’s initiation of the so-called “Four Major

Rivers Restoration Project,” which was opposed by environmental specialists and many citizens. In this context, the participants reflected on rivers and soil from the perspectives of the Bible and faith. They meditated each morning on the Word of God, and on rivers and soil, before a table was set with rice cake and a bottle of drinking water. Eight professors and pastors made short presentations related to the theme. Through dance therapy, everyone experienced healing of body and soul. The common reflection of the students about this Summer School was that their encounter with professors and students from other universities/seminaries was a great experience, but that they were not accustomed to the ecumenical model of worship. The saying “You must not expect too much from your first attempt” was proved true at the first Summer School.

15.3.2 2011 Summer School

From Tuesday August 16 to Friday August 19, 2011, the Summer School was conducted with the theme “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace.” 20 professors and 80 students from seven universities and seminaries attended. There were two theme presentations: The Korean Church and Ecumenical Movement, and The Historical and Theological Significance of the WCC 10th Assembly. Rev. Kyung-Jae Yoo lectured on the Korean church and the ecumenical movement. Dr. Rogate Mshana, Program Executive for Economic Justice at the WCC, dealt with the issue of justice and ecumenism, and Dr. Nishihara Renta, a member of the Central Committee of WCC, spoke on the earthquake and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan. The culmination of this Summer School was the students’ presentations on eight issues: gender justice, multi-culturalism, animal rights, poverty and economic justice, climate change, nuclear energy, war and peace, and peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. The students from each university/seminary decided on the topic relevant to their context or

interest and prepared their presentations by themselves. My students from Busan Presbyterian University chose the topic of nuclear energy; I just gave them some information on the topic, and on activists and NGOs working in this area. All of the professors were moved by the presentations. These were no longer just our students but had become of age in their own theological ways And they surprised us a second time. The Common Prayer by the Summer School participants, written by the students, was so touching that our friends translated it into 10 languages. You can read the Common Prayer at the end of this paper.

15.3.3 2012 Summer School

The 2012 Summer School ran from Monday August 20 to Thursday August 23, with the theme “God of Life, God of Justice, God of Peace, Deliver Us from Evil.” 80 students, 20 professors and pastors and six Oikotree roving faculty members participated in this Summer School. The students made presentations on the eight issues of gender justice, multi-culturalism, animal rights, poverty and economic justice, climate change, the nuclear threat, war and peace, and peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. Each group of students was asked to suggest three actions to cope with its chosen issue, and this resulted in a code of action on the eight issues. Talking with the Oikotree roving faculty members was a new experience for both the students and the professors. The participants from that faculty were Dr. Dora Valentine (Cuba), Dr. Vuyani Vellem (South Africa), Mr. Martin Gueck (Germany), Dr. Evangeline Rajikumar-Anderson (India), Rev. Jennifer Leath (USA), Dr. Rogate Mshana (Tanzania), Dr. Sung-Won Park, and Dr. Yoon-Jae Jang (Korea). Students and professors enjoyed a theological talk show with Oikotree roving faculty members focusing on two questions: “What does the WCC theme mean in my context?” and “What are the current trends in theological education, what are the compelling challenges for alternative theological education and training, and what

would the Oikos Theology Movement look like in my context?” Students and professors alike appreciated the sharing with Oikotree roving faculty members through group talk and a global cultural festival. Though it was not easy for the students to understand the problems and issues of theological education in the different countries, they recognized that many of the issues were the same for all seminaries and universities.

15.3.4 2013 Summer School

This Summer School took place from August 19 to 21, 2013, at Hanmaeum Community, just before the opening of the WCC Busan Assembly, with the school taking the form of a mock WCC Assembly. Professors introduced the themes of the official WCC documents—unity, mission, justice and peace—and reflected on those documents from their own perspectives. A Student Committee and Taskforce Teams had been organized earlier, during the 2012 Winter School. The Taskforce Teams included: spiritual life team, theme deliberations team, ecumenical conversations team, business sessions team, and teams on nuclear issues, religious pluralism, etc. Students and professors participated in the ecumenical conversations according to their own interests. The ecumenical conversations dealt with the five themes of economic justice and eco-justice, multi-faith realities, peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula, church renewal, and diakonia. The students were provided with information about GETI (Global Ecumenical Theological Institute) and KETI (Korean Ecumenical Theological Institute). The participants adopted the Message from the Oikos Summer School 2013, which was written by student representatives and a professor, and included their particular experiences, their encounters and their decisions on what should be done. During the WCC Busan Assembly, an Oikos Korea Madang and

an Ecumenical Café were operated by the Oikos Theology Movement in Korea.

15.3.5 2014 Summer School

This Summer School ran from Monday August 18 to Thursday August 21, 2014, with the theme “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace with the Bible.” Nine professors, 45 students from six universities and seminaries, two PCK youth representatives, and a member of Korean Christian Environmental Solidarity attended. Theme presentations dealt with the de-nuclearisation movement and inclusive community focusing on gender justice. There were two kinds of group discussions. One was student-initiated group discussions focusing on such issues as the story of Hagar and Sarah, ecumenical living in the church and the world, the meaning of Korean theology in Asia, general studies and theology, and the Bible and faith in today’s world. The other kind was professor-initiated discussions dealing with issues such as ecumenical worship, preaching eco-justice with meals, postmodern theology and ecumenism, life solidarity through death, prayer and action, de-nuclearisation movement in Busan, and the difference between Jesus’ peace and empire’s peace.

15.3.6 2015 Summer School

From Monday August 17 to Thursday August 20, 2015, this Summer School proceeded under the theme “Pilgrimage of Peace, Ways to Reconciliation.” Nine professors, 55 students from nine universities and seminaries including Methodist and Baptist seminaries, and representatives of PCK Youth took part. The location of the Summer School in Mount Jiri was tragic as well as beautiful, because it was a site of genocide during the Korean War. The theme presentations focused on remembrance of the wartime genocide, St. Francis of Assisi and eco-spirituality. St. Francis’ spirituality and eco-spirituality were affirmed as

contributing positively to the healing of historical wounds and to the opening of ways to reconciliation. The students of each university/seminary were asked to visit a place related to the theme of the Summer School. During the Summer School they shared their particular experiences of pilgrimage to Daejeon Prison (genocide), a “comfort women” demonstration, Gori Nuclear Power Plant in Busan, and the May 18th National Cemetery, and of a campus nature pilgrimage. The 2015 Summer School introduced the new programs of walking in silence, a visit to Sanchung Memorial Park, a lecture on Mt. Jiri history, and the recitation of poems. The participants adopted the Common Confession of Peace, Reconciliation and Pilgrimage from the Oikos Summer School 2015. This Common Confession includes reconciliation with oneself, reconciliation with neighbors, reconciliation with God, reconciliation with nature, and reconciliation with history.

15.4 Organisation and Methodology of the Oikos Summer School

The preparation of the Summer School requires several meetings by the professors and the student representatives. Each professor should donate 200 dollars, and some of them become fund-raisers for the Summer School. At night the professors gather and talk about their married life, which can be a healing time.

Most of the professors have published books or written articles on issues of economic justice, eco-justice, gender justice, ecumenism, peace mission, life-giving mission, reunification of the Korean peninsula, multi-culturalism, climate change, life-giving meals, de-nuclearisation, or animal rights. No professor, however, can offer students lectures that deal with all of these themes. Only the Summer School is able to achieve this.

The methodology of Oikos Summer School consists of the three stages to see, to judge, and to act. The school encourages students to see the realities of the world and the church, to judge those realities from Biblical and theological perspectives, and to respond to those realities. In contrast, traditional theological education starts with theory, which it applies to reality.

The planning team for the Summer School tries to keep harmony among learning, spirituality and activities, aiming at the practice of integrated theological education. In traditional theological education the roles of professor and student are fixed. In the Oikos Summer School, however, professors can learn from students, and students can teach each other and professors as well. Thus, they can form a learning-and-teaching community.

Many students experienced ecumenical worship at the Oikos Summer School for the first time. And their response to it was not positive at the beginning. The Oikos Summer School, however, is the only chance for them to experience it.

Just as the Oikotree roving faculty participated in the Oikos Summer School, representatives of students and professors likewise attended ecumenical meetings such as the Youth for Eco-justice meeting held in Durban, South Africa in 2011, the Mission Pre-Event meeting of WCC held in Manila in 2012, the WCC Consultation on Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology held in Bogor, Indonesia in 2012, and the Oikotree Global Forum held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2013.

All of the above methods and outcomes can be called positive examples of alternative theological education.

15.5 Difficulties of the Oikos Summer School

The change of students every three or four years is inevitable for alternative theological education. Some professors have recognized this Summer School as a starting stage, rather than a developmental stage.

The disparities among participants in their knowledge and consciousness of Summer School themes and issues is a cause of agony for the preparation of committee members, as they try to choose themes, aims and programs.

Following the immediate period after the WCC Busan Assembly, there has been a decrease in the number of Summer School participants. The fact that the Oikos Winter School was held only in 2011 and 2012 is evidence of this trend.

15.6 Tasks of Oikos Summer School

We have many tasks. How can we increase the number of students from PCK seminaries/universities (as most of the professors work at PCK seminaries)? How can we make a more ecumenical Oikos Summer School, not only in Korea, but outside the country as well? How can we contribute to a paradigm change in Korean theological education? How can we share these experiences with global South/North seminaries and universities? In this respect, I want to convey thanks from the Oikos Theology Movement in Korea to all of you, who have offered us this opportunity to share our experience.

15.7 Suggestions for the Oikos Summer School

This suggestion to expand participation from global South and North has been discussed several times among the professors, but owing to financial difficulties, it has never been acted upon. Could it ever be

possible for the Oikos Summer School to be a global summer school taking place every three years (with students and professors from Asian, African and Western seminaries/universities)?

During the last six years, the Oikos Summer School has been conducted at a fixed place. What about an Oikos Summer School on the move? Students from each seminary/university could visit green churches, eco-villages/communities, nuclear power plants, immigrant mission centers, and so on, choosing freely in relation to the theme of the Summer School; and come together for mutual sharing of those experiences.

The book *Climate Change: A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa* (2009), published by the South African Council of Churches, could be used as a textbook for the Oikos Summer School and the Korean churches, especially in the PCK Ecumenical Decade for Healing and Reconciling Life-community, to wrestle with climate change. The publication *Table of Life and World of Peace*, written in Korean by Dr. Kyung-Ho Chung, co-chair of the Oikos Theology Movement in Korea, could be used as a textbook on food security.

The aim of theological education is to reconnect members of the global life community (ontology), to understand knowing as reciprocal action between subject and object (epistemology), to encourage community-centred classes (education), and to be participants in the oikos of God taking responsibility for the oikos (ethics), as Parker J. Palmer said. In this respect, the Oikos Theology Movement in Korea and the Oikos Summer School will contribute to nurturing pastors and missionaries to cope with climate change and food security based on eco-theology.

