

## **Handout 1.4**

# **“On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee” United States, 1994**

### **Background**

Prompted by other Kairos documents, particular the 1985 document from South Africa and others from Latin America, “a disparate, wide, and versatile conversation began in the United States about the opportunities of the theological and political crisis” on the eve of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Columbus. In March 1990 in Seoul, Korea, at a convocation of the World Council of Churches a gathering of people of faith composed largely of people of color found themselves asking: “wouldn't the quincentenary, with its official celebration of imperial history, be the very occasion to recognize and name this decisive kairos moment for people of faith in the United States?” Out of this, a racially, ethnically, and geographically diverse group of Christians worked collaboratively to develop this document.

### **Sense of Urgency**

“There are times in history when social crisis threatens to unravel society, but such times are often periods of transition, invitation, and opportunity. The New Testament word for such a time is “kairos,” a time pregnant with possibilities. This is such a moment. As Christians in the United States we believe that this is a kairos time. At these historical junctures, ideological analysis and solutions are inadequate. Old political categories prove increasingly useless, “Kairos” instead calls for a deeper discernment of God's action in history, then compels our action in solidarity to the point of risk. The empire in which we dwell serves the idols we are forbidden to worship. Systemic injustice and perverse values, social evil and personal irresponsibilities permeate the fabric of our lives. The crisis in our nation is far greater than the sum of our many social ills, it strikes deeply into the heart of all that identifies who we are and where we are going as a people. Our structures, values, habits, and assumptions require basic transformation. But neither politics nor piety as we know them will effect such a change. The crisis of our times cries out for our conversion. At such a time as this, we as people of faith must remember who we are and to whom we belong.”

### **Reading the Signs of the Times (Social Analysis)**

“Social oppression and cultural breakdown are the twin signs of our age. One has to do with structural injustice; the other, with the collapse of values. Some will speak only of oppression; some, only of breakdown. It is the heart of the tragic split between liberals and conservatives. But to miss the reality of either is to misunderstand the dimensions and depth of our present crisis. Both oppression and breakdown are real; and the two are integrally related. To understand the realities of both social oppression and cultural breakdown, and the dynamic connection between the two, is the beginning of political and spiritual wisdom. There is a vast emptiness in this land, a lack of moral vision, dullness of spirit which the scriptures call hardness of heart. It is a spiritual crisis that we face, and every attempt to define it as less will only lead to more denial and more pain.”

“Perhaps the most painful and dangerous sign of the crisis is what is happening to our children... The contemporary disintegration of family life is a sign of the crisis... The very structures and values of our society reflect and perpetuate a ‘culture of violence’... Economic injustice is also violence... We are also a divided people... White racism is America’s original sin... The domination of human beings and the domination of earth cannot be separated... Now we face the

real possibility of catastrophe at the heart of creation..."

"The crisis is not only in our society. The crisis is in our churches. With notable exceptions, people of faith and churches in our land have failed to recognize and adequately respond to the idolatries that abound. The very identity of our churches has long been inseparable from the identity of the state. We have readily assimilated the values and priorities of U.S. culture. Thus, too often our churches no longer know who we are and to whom we belong. For the churches, too, this is a kairos moment in which we are called to conversion, our structures, values, habits, and assumptions in need of basic transformation. Instead of challenging the status quo, the church tends to reinforce, if not bless, things as they are, usually under the guise of being "politically neutral." It accomplishes this by spiritualizing, privatizing, and generally undermining God's option for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Issues of power, class, gender, and material interests contained in the biblical texts have been too often ignored, even suppressed."

### **Theological Reflection**

"In our own process of reflection, there was an identifiable moment, a time and place where it was suddenly asked: 'Isn't the spirit of Jubilee at the heart of what we envision?' The question itself sounded with the clarity of a trumpet. Biblically, the jubilee legislation (Lev. 25) was drafted toward the end of exile in Babylon. It envisioned the new order which was possible in the rebuilding and restoration, in the return to the land. Its provisions drew upon more ancient prescriptions for the Sabbatical year. They were adapted and consolidated from the covenantal code of the tribal confederacy (Ex. 21:2-6; 23:9-11) and from the deuteronomic reform movement which flourished under the monarchy (Deut. 15: 1-18). Together, the cycle of sabbatical and jubilee years included such provisions as allowing the land to lie fallow (that the earth may "rest" and "so the poor may eat"), the cancellation or forgiveness of debts, the freeing of slaves, and the redistribution of lands and houses, restoring them to families by whom they had been lost or sold in the interim. The voice of Isaiah, prophet of reconstruction and return, heralds the acceptable year in jubilee images (Is. 51:1-4). Jesus, so says Luke, makes Isaiah his inaugural text and infuses the realm of God with the spirit of the jubilee. In this same manner, not as programmatic legalism but as provocative spark to the imagination, we recognize in this kairos a jubilean time."

### **Call to Action**

"We are led by the Spirit to form alliances across difference...to a new relationship with the earth and all its creatures based on a deep sense of kinship...to shape a culture of radical nonviolence...to rebuild the fabric of our families and our communities...to birth new forms of community...to create new visions and possibilities...to relinquish and renounce economic privilege...to free economic imagination...to restructure radically the global economy...We seek nothing less than the conversion of our cultural soul, of our values as a people, of our priorities as a nation. For that reason, we pray first for conversion of our own stony hearts. It is time in this place for humility, sensitivity, generosity. It is time for us to give flesh to the discipleship communities which may seed the deepest transformation of our families and neighborhoods, of the institutional church, and the dominant society...Thus, we commit ourselves to the works of repentance—to reparation, redress, re-valuing. We commit ourselves to enact the Jubilee concretely in our communities, our institutions, our lives...In the spirit of community, mindful of truth ever exceeding our knowledge, let us covenant to live in a manner explicitly informed by the Gospel we proclaim. Amen."