



# Common Mission

in different contexts

Wordings of the Theological Consultation 2005

## Preface

### *A common mission – is it possible? A common mission of churches from the North and from the South, churches which in their own, completely different contexts bear witness to God's love, which they recognise in Jesus Christ?*

Four German and two African churches were in contact with each other for more than 150 years. Today, the member churches of Bremen Mission represent something like a comprehensible and very intimate community. Reciprocal visits, partnerships, joint church services, praying together and for each other, helping each other are the solid foundation of this „family“ as this community is frequently called by its African members. They are connected by their common history, mutual confidence and a high degree of reliability.

Given that these churches have so much that unites them, given especially that they bear mutual responsibility for “their mission work” of which they were members for the last five years, we intended to investigate what is our common mission in the different contexts of God's One World.

What is the basis that connects a pharmacy project in Ghana with a plan for church service renewal? What are the possible relationships between the prosecution situation of Christians in Togo and an “alternative shop” of a congregation? How is the engagement of an ecumenical initiative supporting One-World-Shops connected with the training of professional or voluntary workers of the church or with a public relations office in the inner city?

It is said that the “missionary situation” in Germany is, indeed, very different from the one in Ghana and Togo. The projects that are presented by the participants as their “missionary projects” are similarly different. The German participants were, for example, most surprised to learn that a pharmacy in Ghana is conceived as a missionary project whereas they would rather have classified it as a commercial or, at the utmost, a diaconal issue. At the same time, the African participants did not easily understand that a project such as the public relations address of a city church was classified as a missionary project even though it was solely communicative and had no social or diaconal aspect.

During the consultation of Bremen Mission that was held from June 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005, in Haus Meedland in Langeoog, such “strange and surprising issues” provided good and exciting moments because their discussion stimulated intensive reciprocal questioning and search for connecting topics and mutual axioms.

Within Bremen Mission, it is most helpful that a very direct, immediate exchange of ideas is made possible by the comprehensible relation framework and by the very concentrated and spiritually stimulating atmosphere of the consultation. There was no need to hide one's own weaknesses and deficiencies; on the contrary, they could be discussed openly, sometimes controversially, but always with the intent of finding a solution.

In this respect, the concept of the consultation was most helpful. Considerations of contextual nature, practical examples, biblical contemplation, and a detailed general issues paper, all these elements supplemented each other and were instrumental to provide access to the question how essential discussion lines to the mission of God (missio dei) and to the challenges of globalisation are related to each other.

Different aspects of these questions became discussion topics:

The missionary context in Africa and Germany was enquired into. Above all, it is remarkable how many different aspects provide access to this topical question. While Jann Schmidt considers the general social structure in Germany as a challenge to the church, Togo is terribly pressed by the actual political situation in that country.

Looking at this question in a theological manner, the main difference concerns the classification of the mission as part of the actions of the church. Louis-Ferdinand von Zobeltitz represents the dialogue-oriented, open and ecumenical character of the mission after overcoming the false opposition of ecumenism or mission which had for many years dominated the discussion within the church. The line-up of thesis presented by the moderators Dr. Gerson Kodjo Bessa and Dr. Livingstone Komla Buama from Togo and Ghana has to be interpreted in this manner, too. For the mission of the churches, they placed the “partnership” as the basis for reciprocal assistance and mutual activity into the foreground.

The most comprehensive and fundamental paper of this reader is the one of Klaus Schäfer. It classifies the question about a common mission on one side into mission theology (*missio dei*), on the other side into the actual challenges of globalisation. The long common history and the jointly experienced present challenges must result in a common vision of our mission, in which we understand ourselves as a *community of discernment*. In this sense, we need each other as partners, as protection against blind spots, as reciprocal challenge and enquiry, to accompany and to strengthen each other as a source of inspiration and solidarity in our own and joint mission pilgrimage.

The project reports which were meant to substantiate the topics of the consultation indicate the multiplicity of missionary church action: social/diaconal action (*gratis shop*), local and worldwide ecumenical movement (Ecumenical Centre of Oldenburg), education and training (CEPROFORE in Togo), church service renovation (C-plus), or social presence of the church outside the parish church (Kapitel 8).

The bible studies were inspiring, too, with the selection of biblical texts alluding to the multiplicity of mission: based upon the identity of Christ as He Who Acts (Luke 7, 18-23; Bessa), as witness of solidarity (1. Peter 3, 8-17; Ben-Naimah) or as a mediation and transfer process between generations (Dtn. 6, 20-25; Töllner).

The explication of our 4-day consultation forms the starting chapter of this reader. It clarifies that a common history of grown partnership results in a common task in mission. In different contexts, it is observed in various ways. But in spite of that, it is a task to be performed in partnership and in a concrete manner, celebrating together in our community (Partnership Sunday) and encouraging and empowering each other to carry out our mission.

Hannes Menke  
General Secretary of Bremen Mission

## **“OUR COMMON MISSION”**

### **DECLARATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION**

HELD IN LANGEBOOG, GERMANY

FROM 6 – 9 JUNE 2005

#### INTRODUCTION

The sixth Theological Consultation of the six Member-Churches of Bremen Mission was held in Langeboog from the 6 – 9 June, 2005 under the theme: **“Our Common Mission”**.

Participating in this consultation are delegates from

- Eglise Evangélique Presbytérienne du Togo - EEPT
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana – E. P. Church, Ghana
- Bremische Evangelische Kirche - BEK
- Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Oldenburg - ELKiO
- Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche in Deutschland - ErK
- Lippische Landeskirche - LLK

and resource persons from various missionary bodies such as

- Evangelisches Missionswerk, EMW, Hamburg
- United in Mission, UiM, Wuppertal
- Evangelisches Missionswerk in Südwestdeutschland, EMS, Stuttgart
- Communauté d’Eglises en Mission - Cevaa, Montpellier

We reflected during these four days on the importance of “Mission” and we became aware again that the Mission is the essential characteristic of each Church. We shared our missionary concepts within our different contexts and we deepened our fellowship in daily Bible studies and evening prayers.

With this final declaration we want to appeal to our Churches and Congregations to develop a new passion and enthusiasm

- to accept the missionary challenge in their particular context in regard to the rapid and dramatic changes that are going on in the world affecting each corner and each people on earth
- and to strengthen our community of the six Member-Churches of the Bremen Mission which we consider vital for our own Christian Faith and Life.

## General Understanding of our Mission

1. As the six Member-Churches of Bremen we understand ourselves as part of the one Holy, Catholic and Christian Church, the Body of Christ. It is God himself, who has brought the Life into being and who has confirmed his promise through Jesus Christ to protect and accompany his creation and the life of his beloved people. It is God himself, who wants to bring to all people his salvation, peace, reconciliation and justice. It is his will to use us as instrument and participants in this work. We are required to discern what God wants us to undertake within a particular period and at a particular locality. This is called today the contextualisation of the gospel.
2. We are convinced that we have a common mission. This mission is coined by a common history and experience and by a present solidarity in regard to the various challenged of our time. We consider the community of our six Churches as part of our spiritual and historical identity. Founded on the Bible, the common source of our Faith, Love and Hope, we affirm to stand in solidarity together. We are determined to share our different stories of Faith and Concerns, our particular gifts and joys in order to learn from other and to be strengthened in our own Faith and engagement.
3. We experience the common service as a major unifying tie. While celebrating together the presence of God in our midst with our different aspirations and thoughts, our gratitude and are different questions we feel assured that God is with us to confirm us the brotherhood of Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, and the strength (power) of his Spirit.
4. We reaffirm the understanding of mission as a holistic mission in the sense how the EEPT has formulated it in 1964: "*the Whole Gospel to the Whole Human Being*". This includes the spiritual need of the people as well as their physical demand, to overcome poverty, injustice and the negligence of the dignity of a human being, the commitment for peace, reconciliation and mutual respect.
5. We have become aware again of the different socio-economic living conditions our Churches are living in. There are different histories and cultural backgrounds, different needs and challenges, different aspirations and activities. We have accepted as a matter of fact these differences in order to fulfil the will of God at different places faithfully. Our mission task is not a free choice to impose own convictions on others but an act of Faith and Obedience to God's will to carry out with a particular passion and talent in a particular situation, environment and locality that each Church is asked.

We respect it and feel obliged to support one another in the particular mission approach by prayer and practical solidarity.

6. To accept the mission dimension of the life of the Church will prevent each Congregation from becoming introverted focussing only to serve the own Congregation or Church Members only and waiting and hoping that others may join them. A new openness is demanded that entails to look beyond the boundaries of the own Church or Congregation and to listen and to go to the people we are living with. “To go and not to wait” is being required. Mission becomes another word for being interested in the people instead of waiting for people to be interested in the Church. This certainly will change a certain prevailing mentality.

### **Living in solidarity one with another**

What we have learnt and what we would like to propose:

- From the E.P. Church, Ghana we have learnt that she has identified the struggle to overcome the ignorance of the people as major mission target. To give some examples one can observe among the people ignorance
  - about the reasons of the mushrooming of Christian religious groups
  - about the causes of poverty
  - about AIDS
  - about teenage pregnancy
  - about violence against women
  - about the consequences of child-labour
  - about the political and ethnic dimension of the country
- from the EEPT we have learnt about the anxieties of the people suffering from oppression and insecurity, about the victims of these oppressions in Togo and the refugees in the neighbour countries, Ghana and Benin
- from the German Churches we have learnt about their concern and commitment to regain the hearts of the people, to understand the fears of their people about an uncertain future, to encourage them to develop a new life perspective and to strengthen their confidence in the future that remain always God’s future.

The Member-Churches of Bremen Mission are called to solidarity and are asked to be ready to support the different endeavours of their Partner-Churches.

We endorse projects which try to alleviate the suffering of the victims of oppression within Togo and of the refugees in the neighbour countries, Ghana and Benin.

We endorse the pharmacy project of the E.P. Church in Ho which has been identified as a hopeful venture to overcome a certain lack of better health service to the people in Ho.

We endorse to organise an ecumenical visit of a group of three persons to Germany to witness their Faith in meetings with different groups in different situations.

### **The Partnership Sunday:**

The Partnership Sunday will help our Churches to participate in the different life situations of the Churches. It is an opportunity to let the Congregations of our Churches enter in a permanent mutual learning about the life of the others and to read the Bible with the eyes of the others.

This Partnership Sunday should be held on the Sunday after Pentecost. Each Church appoints a person or a group to provide the material in due time for the Congregations to celebrate the Service with the same biblical text, the same hymns and prayers and the same theme.

We recommend that the selected Theme – i.e. “Who is your neighbour?”- accompanies the Church-Groups and Church-Members throughout the year. At the end the different views and experiences are being collected and exchanged.

### **The Children Bible Project**

We appreciated the Project of the Children Bible of the two Church districts of the E.P. Church and the Reformed Church in Germany as a very good example and contribution to strengthen the fellowship among each other and to listen to life stories of the partners by reading the same biblical texts.

We propose that this new Children Bible, being printed in the four languages “English, Ewe, French and German “ be presented in all Congregations of our Churches as a symbol of a common missionary action.

We want to point out that this project demonstrates in a good way that God is a liberating God who will not tolerate child-slavery and is eager to liberate them from this modern

scourge of exploitation of children and who will defend the rights and the unique dignity of all children as his own children .

### **Practical and new Co-operations**

We realised that the six Churches within the Bremen Mission family represents only a limited community. Therefore any co-operation with other Churches or Mission Agencies, other NGOs or Government Agencies in specific projects should be encouraged. The Agenda 21 process in the Volta-Region has been an encouraging example for us.

Our own Churches could and should intensify their co-operation.

- The co-operation between the EEPT and the E. P. Church on different levels - seminaries, women work, youth work, agriculture.
- We endorse that the other three German Churches participate in the ecumenical visitation program being organised by the Lippe-Church in 2006.

Langeoog/Bremen

9/6/2005



## **The missionary context in Germany**

The first and most important commission of the church is to bring the gospel to the world. Church is mission. One can not think of a church without mission: such church would miss its point.

Mission is not happening for the sake of the church. The church is part of the mission of god. We are asked to open the people's eyes for the truth of the Christian message. Because god wants all men to be saved and to come to him onto the knowledge of truth. (1. Tim. 2,4). Mission and evangelisation come from god. He wants the whole ... salvation of the people and the world.

Christianity has influenced our culture over the past 2000 years: the language, the images, the art, the values and the feasts in the circle of the year. Therefore our situation can not be compared with the one in which the first Christian communities spoke to the Jews and the Heathen about Jesus. It can also not be compared with the situation where missionary workers spoke to members of other religions about the message of Jesus Christ. It is also different to the situation in which churches grow in many parts of the world.

After 2000 years of Christian preaching, the churches in Germany – and even the churches in Western Europe as a whole – find themselves in crises. In East Germany only 25% of the population belong to a church while in West Germany this figure amounts to about 75%.

This means: Big parts of the population don't have any relationship to the church anymore. Nondenomination is a mass phenomenon. Most of the people in East Germany have never been exposed to the church and Christianity. In the eastern federal states of Germany most of the people are nondenominational. Some of them have no relationship to the church in the third generation. The people have grown up with the ideology that religion is opiate for the people.

With some delay, this can also become the reality in West Germany. Although about 75% of the people still belong to a church, most of them do not have any continuous relationship to the church. Most of the members of the congregation only participate selectively in the community of the church. Only if required and at certain biographical occasions such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, funerals, people come to the church. Religion and church have not fully disappeared in the lives of the people but they are not the priority anymore.

The situation in Germany – the missionary context – is therefore very complex. Not only in the public life of the church but also in the media people are openly talking about a crisis in the church. Crisis is however also an opportunity. It does not only show us what went wrong but it is also a signal that things can not continue the way they are. Hence, there is a realistic chance for change.

It might be slightly comforting that almost all institutions in society find themselves in a crisis of Identity. Political parties and trade unions are in a similar situation as the

churches. Many people don't find any support from politics and business to manage their lives.

As an institution the church is not the first to be asked about the meaning of life. What the church has to offer does not necessarily provide an answer for those who have questions. The Christian faith has lost its monopoly. The church has to compete on an open market of those trying to give meaning to people's lives.

We find a market of opportunities for religious and church orientation that has never been there before. However most people don't make use of these opportunities but instead immigrate in a religious No-man's-land. As a result the distance from the church as an institution is growing. It is bigger in metropolitan areas than in rural areas and more strongly developed among young people than among older people.

Nevertheless, it is not a task of mission and evangelisation to save the church as an institution, it is also not the aim to fill empty benches. It is about something that cannot be measured or counted. It is about the gospel. The church has the duty to communicate the gospel. And it has to communicate the gospel in a way that it comes to the people in the context of our time and our world.

To bring the gospel to the people can mean something very different depending on the time and the location. In our country people are generally not as excited about the gospel than what they are about good news which they expect or need to know. As far as the gospel is concerned most people think that they know already long time what it is all about.

In our country there is nowadays very seldom an unlimited identification with a certain theory or an institution. This is also true for the church and the Christian faith. Usually people have certain reservations. At the same time people are longing for safety and security. For this reason people are looking for meaningfulness and support in non-Christian religions such as the Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or in new religious movements and sects.

One should also not forget about the small religions in life which do not come across as religions. In Germany daily needs such as success, beauty, health or consumption have become a substitute of religion. That is the missionary context.

As a result the evangelical church finds itself in time of change. It has to strongly compete. It has to deal with the situation of change in society and a process of secularisation; it has to respond to decreasing religious commitment and a loss of Christian values. In order to respond reasonably to this situation it is essential to acknowledge the factors in society that have determined the religious landscape over past decades.

In Western Europe secularisation has advanced the most. Nowhere else have religion and its institutions lost so much private and public meaning. This is practically true for the Christian churches. Because of their religious practice many parts of society see them as

meaningless from a cultural point of view. The former strong and sometimes problematic influence of the church on public life is nowadays not visible anymore.

It is obvious that the church has lost its influence in society. Evidence for this is not only the abolition of the day of prayer and repentance as a public holiday but also the discussion about the abolition of religious schooling in our schools and the attempt to declare the Sunday as a normal day of work as well as the announcements made by a new generation of stakeholders in politics, business and administration that religion is a private matter.

Religious orientation, the decision about church membership or the type of affiliation to a church have become a private matter like never before. This does not necessarily mean that people are turning away from Christianity but many don't find a relationship between the traditional Christian doctrine and their daily lives. And therefore they try to find their own religious answers on questions and experiences which they have.

Scientific technical progress, more wealth and a liberal way of life have increased the opportunities to plan and live one's personal life. Individualism and pluralism are main features of the development in society over the past decades. However this development also has its downsides. On the one hand the opportunities have increased to live one's own life. On the other hand the traditional environment of the church the family and the job have lost their natural and relieving function.

Christianity depends on passing on content of faith and religious practice from generation to generation. However families in Germany are today places of religious speechlessness and remarkable helplessness when it comes to conveying religious beliefs. Whereas the families used to be the place where Christianity was established this task has now become the duty of the church. However, conveying Christianity can only succeed if the social community of the family supports it.

The federal republic of Germany has become a multicultural and also increasingly a multireligious country over the past decades. The migration of people from other religious origins takes place in a time where breaking with traditions and a process of secularisation play an important role.

The media determines more and more our thinking about the world. A culture of pictures and symbols replaces a culture of words. The media environment and the obvious computerisation of the daily life determine more and more our communication and our work processes but also our experience of reality. In all areas of life the knowledge is expanding with a tremendous speed. The ongoing flow of information produces however a loss of orientation. The more we know the less we know about what is important and what is not.

Thanks to the little weekly working hours and the relative wealth of those who have work we live in a society where people have lots of free time, high consumption and a strong drive towards mobility and adventure. One's own leisure time has become of increasing significance for most people. Therefore, church activities collide more than ever with free time interests of many parts of our society.

These tendencies need to influence the work of the church in future because this is our missionary context. The tendencies in society can not easily be reversed but have to be taken into account in all processes of change in the church. The work of the church is still too much influenced by the expectation that the people come to the church and not the church to the people. Such an attitude does not satisfy those members who look for an “instant church” but do not want commit themselves on a continuing basis.

Practically in the congregations the church made lots of time and energy available for the requests and needs of children and old aged people. This is much appreciated. However, the concentration of these age groups may sometimes lead to a situation where other members of the church only find a few offers for themselves. Nevertheless, the live of the congregation can only grow if it is experienced as invitational for everyone.

The evangelical church has a profile crisis. Over the past decades the work of the church has become much more differentiated: Youth-work, women-work, mini-groups, evangelical academies, to do handicrafts for bazaars, initiatives for the unemployed, marriage and family counselling, old age holidays, homework support, church asylum groups, telephone counselling – the picture of the church has become more colourful, open and manifold. Church leadership has accepted the task by including new work areas in church institutions but we have not succeeded to combine the manifold activities internally and externally so that one could really experience what kind of wider service the church achieves for the lives of individual people as well as for shaping our society as a whole.

The only unknown in the church are the strangers, the so called distant people. In East as well as in West Germany they are the majority of members, but a little is known about them. They don't talk much about their distance although it speaks their own language. They belong to the church but they don't make use of it. They don't want to be involved in the concrete church but they also don't want to leave the church. They form the majority but they don't have a voice in the church. At the same time they are the ones who require that Christians from the inner circles of the congregation attend to them.

I think it is important, to refer specifically the loyal members of congregation to this missionary context so that they can turn towards these people.

Maybe those with the distance relationship have never missed the church. But most probably they have also never noticed that the church is missing them. The church does not only need the concentration towards its inner circles but also openness towards the outside world. Therefore it is important to think about the missionary context and we find it in our own house.

Jann Schmidt

President of the Evangelical Reformed Church

## LE PARTENARIAT VU PAR L'EEPT

1. Nous pensons que la Norddeutsche Mission a franchi un pas important dans son histoire en devenant dans les années 2000 une Association. Cette Association a donné naissance à une vue nouvelle des relations liant les Eglises impliquées. Les quatre Eglises d'Allemagne et les deux d'Afrique (Togo - Ghana).

2. La notion de mission dans cette nouvelle association prend de nouvelle connotation :
- elle n'est plus à sens unique;
  - elle n'est plus partenarisme;
  - elle mission de partout vers partout.

Les Eglises du Nord discutent et décident d'égal à égal avec les Eglises du Sud. De plus, les Eglises du Nord peuvent recevoir des missionnaires du Sud. Le rapprochement Sud-Sud doit devenir plus visible, tout comme celui Nord-Nord.

3. L'argent dans le "commerce" entre les six Eglises a une part importante, mais il n'a pas une place plus importante que l'être humain, et encore moins, il ne remplace pas l'être humain.

4. L'activité missionnaire vise donc en priorité l'être humain, qu'il soit en Allemagne ou en Afrique, pauvre ou riche.

5. Les notions comme "pauvreté" et "richesse" ont besoin d'être resivitées, réanalysées au sein de l'Association et à la lumière de notre référence la Bible, et de notre pratique de la foi.

6. Même si l'on se situait au niveau d'une approche matérialiste de ces notions, nous pouvons affirmer que les sociétés dites d'abondance ont besoin elles aussi de mission. Qu'une société d'abondance ait en son sein des espaces de pauvreté, telle est l'une des découvertes de la consultation théologique (Langeoog, juin 2005).

7. Dans tous les cas au sein de l'Association, il s'agit de mettre ensemble "richesse" et "pauvreté" en vue d'une commune mission. De réunion en réunion, l'on réfléchira à comment traduire dans les actes concrets cet idéal.

8. En attendant :

- a) l'EEPT a besoin de l'appui de l'Association pour initier le service de l'Aumônerie Militaire, une action en direction de l'Armée Togolaise.
- b) Ensuite, elle envisage l'accueil d'un Inspecteur ecclésiastique de OLDENBURG en vue d'appuyer et d'encadrer le travail de l'un des Inspecteurs de l'EEPT dans son travail auprès des groupes organisés en l'occurrence les Femmes.  
Une visite retour du Togo/EEPT à OLDENBURG n'est pas à exclure. Des visites de part et d'autres entre Jeunes. Il s'agit de vivre le principe de l'interculturalité.
- c) Des actions dans le domaine de Justice et Paix sont envisagées. Il s'agira de ceci que par des ateliers, séminaires et autres forums de former à la culture de la Paix construite sur la Justice.

Pour la délégation EEPT

Le Modérateur Rev. Dr. Kodjo BESSA

## EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PARTNERSHIP

1. Partnership for us is not **PATERNALISM** (Master-Servant Relationship)
2. For us, Partnership is ***Covenanting, Collaboration, Friendship, and Fellowship***
3. It consciously creates room for ***mutual respect encouragement*** and ***empowerment***
4. It is an opportunity for us to ***explore, listen, learn and share*** our gifts and talents even as we work together in order to promote Christ's agenda of salvation
5. It is an opportunity for us to ***grow together*** as we work together in the faith with concrete programs and activities in mind
6. The key pin in Partnership is **LOVE**. Partnership is forged and formed in Love. And by Love without Love, it is impossible to have a meaningful and fulfilling Partnership.

Moderator Rev. Dr. Livingstone Buama

E.P. Church, Ghana

## Outline for Missionary Concepts in the Evangelical Churches in Germany

### „Go ye therefore, and teach all nations“

#### Aspects of a Missionary Church

##### 1. Starting-point

*„Nobody can deny that our church institutions are in deep dilapidation. The living part of public worship of God and of sacred rituals has disappeared almost completely. The influence of religious convictions upon the morals and upon their valuation is hardly noticeable. The lively interaction between preachers and their congregations is as good as dissolved. Church manners and discipline have completely disappeared. The spiritual body as a whole ...has entered into a continuously declining state.“*

This gloomy image of the church did not originate in our days. The author is Friedrich Schleiermacher, the time is the beginning of the 19th century (cited from Wolfgang Huber, Church at the Turning-point, page 97). As long as church lasts, there is lamentation inside. Church does not comply with its standards.

I believe, however, that the process of change taking place in Germany has a new meaning. The certainty of the living God is gradually disappearing, this is the fundamental fact in this process of change. Many people say that we are living in a “post-Christian era”. The process of secularisation seems to be irreversible.

Another fundamental aspect of the process of change is an increasing tendency towards individualism. This social trend has been intensified. Pluralism and individualism define our society. The church thereby lost its monopoly in respect of religion, sense of direction, and orientation of life. Its message has long ago become an offer among others, an offer on the market of religions and world philosophies of life.

But this is the consequence: membership of the church is no longer self-evident. No longer are we automatically born into the church, because our parents and grandparents were Protestants or Catholics, we followed them. It is a matter of one's own free will and decision whether one acquires membership of a party, a union or even a church. Our society tolerates the retirement from the church.

Another consequence is the loss of church members. To our mothers and fathers who believed, this would have seemed strange. On one side, there is no need to panic. On the other side, the disappointing figures should not remain unattended.

During the last 25 years, the Evangelical Church of Bremen lost more than half of its members. This alarming loss of members was mainly caused by two factors: voluntary retirement and unfavourable demographic developments.

It should be noted that the age of church members differs significantly from the age of the general population. Compared to the population, we Christians are over-aged. Therefore, the number of our members that pay church tax continues to decrease slowly. In the long run, this situation may become difficult. In other words: we must successfully interest the generation aged 20 to 60 years into our church events and activities.

Membership of a church is no longer self-evident. We can no longer rely on the impressive power of Christian traditions. The times when we could placate ourselves with the self-evidence of Christian values and standards are over.

## **2. Proposal for a mission church**

### **2.1 Mission is a fundamental aspect of the church**

During the EKD-Synod in Leipzig in November 1999, Eberhard Jüngel used an impressive image to illustrate the theological truth that church is either missionary or loses touch with its objectives:

*„If the church had a heart, a heart that was still beating, then the rhythm of the church’s heart would be dominated by the tasks of evangelisation and mission. Any deficits of the missionary duties of the Christian church ... would immediately and seriously damage the heart rhythm ... Therefore, mission and evangelisation must be of interest to anyone who cherishes a healthy blood circulation in the life of the church. It is true that genuine mission work has largely become the speciality of a certain style of pious behaviour. One must neither criticise the groups that are intensely engaged in this field nor truly charismatic preachers! But if mission and evangelisation are not on the agenda of the church as a whole, or if they are not re-instituted into the said agenda, then the heart beat of the church is in disorder.”*

According to its nature, the church will not rest in itself but will go beyond frontiers and boundaries, will teach the Gospel in a new language and new style in the changing society. Mission is not a secondary task of the church, it is part of its character.

The task is categorical and unambiguous: the church must do missionary work. But in actual fact, this does not always happen. The Catholic East-German author Günter de Bruyn emphasised to the Evangelical Churches: *„Looking at the Evangelical Church from outside, looking at its few members whom I know personally, I notice pleasant, good and enjoyable qualities. I notice within those qualities the happy peace that enables them to have high-level talks with their friends when at the same time their number decreases steadily.*

*To express the same thought in a coarser way: I notice a certain passivity possibly originating from the acceptance of the pluralistic society and from the tolerance that is required within it towards other beliefs and philosophies. Tolerance is rightly considered a virtue; but tolerance originating from indifference or lack of interest loses all its virtuousness. To tolerate the convictions of others is of value only if it hurts me, being convinced of my own beliefs. However, in that case I shall endeavour to convince others, keeping their own interest in mind. I find that such attempts are rare... Therefore, the Protestants who are so near and intimate to me are lacking in the visible determination not only to win but also to recover lost souls; in one word, if this word is still allowed: mission. In old times, people with strong convictions went for this purpose to the South Sea or to Greenland, not being afraid of toil and hardship. Today, they do not have to face hardships. The only thing they have to do*



*is to approach their neighbours, to show more self-confidence in public or to support church initiatives in democratic institutions. Neither nature nor state power prevents them from doing it. But instead of using their freedom, they idealise the shrinking church, creating the impression that a decreasing number of Christians leads to an improvement of its quality. This is a contradiction to the task „Go ye therefore, and teach all nations - or go at least into the next village“.*

## **2.2 A fruitless fight ends**

During the 60s and 70s years, mission and evangelisation were not cherished in our churches. Mission was considered traditional and antiquated. In view of the misery in the so-called third world, ascribing this misery to colonialism and continuing exploitation, new guiding expressions dominated the mission-theological debate: development and liberation. Mission history was in many respects brought into relation with imperial indoctrination and unbearable intolerance. In the face of this massive criticism of mission and evangelisation, a new interpretation of mission was endeavoured. Many had problems with the word “mission”. For example, Erhard Mische often raised the question whether it would be appropriate to find a new name for Bremen Mission. The expression “mission” could be misunderstood.

Others, especially persons from the evangelical camp, raised objections: they considered the attempt to establish a new meaning of mission as treason towards the biblical order to evangelise. For many decades, an intensive fight flared up in the churches. Both sides used simplifying statements: the evangelicals were attacked because they were said to be interested only in a narrow kind of mission, not ready to shoulder social and political responsibility.

On the other side, the evangelicals never became tired of attacking those who did not share their theological positions, claiming that they were replacing mission and evangelisation by political and social activities.

A quite fruitless fight is nearing its end. A fight that prevented us for a long time from jointly fulfilling our task to be a missionary church. The EKD-Synod in Leipzig in November 1999 proved that all camps of our church have commenced to listen to each other, to question each other and to search for ways how we could today be a missionary church.

## **2.3 Mission – how we understand it today – 10 thesis**

### **(1) Mission lives from its readiness to communicate**

Mission in a free community can be understood only as a process of dialogue in which our communication partner is and remains a free subject. The equality of rights of the partners is a precondition even if one believes passionately in the truth of one’s own beliefs. Active tolerance and respect towards the partner and his/her convictions is required. Missionary practice in structured dialogues assumes that God is present to all people. Even outside the church, one can observe signs of attachment to the Christian belief.

### **(2) Mission being a process of dialogue comprises one’s own readiness to learn**

A person believing that he/she is the only owner of the truth is unable to encounter other people openly and without prejudice. Talking to other people, we are able to discover whether they stand for convictions and causes that are neglected by us as

Christians. A church that shoulders its missionary responsibilities is a church for others by being a church with others, to say that it proceeds on its way together with others.

### **(3) Mission directs itself initially towards our own inner being**

To recover the missionary existence towards ourselves is today an urgent task in the evangelical churches of Germany. At stake is the recovery of a belief that can be explained. If a church knows where it comes from and is capable of communicating its belief in a human way, it will be sufficiently attractive even for strangers of the church.

### **(4) Mission needs a communicative theology**

How and why the happenings and events witnessed in the bible are of importance to people in their present situation, how it liberates them into belief and how it encourages them to support others, this shall be witnessed in an understandable manner. For this purpose, we need a communicative theology which does not supply ready answers but searches for answers that are understandable and in line with the situation, having regard to the people and their critical experiences, doubts, anxieties and questions.

### **(5) Mission is open for all of us**

We should experiment more, try to get in touch with people without forcing them to fulfil initial conditions. People should discover open doors to our hearts. Any anxieties which might have survived must be dismantled.

### **(6) “Laymen/laywomen” play a decisive role in the mission process**

Presence, together with the witness of church members, are the most important forms of missionary action. In this manner, people witness the Gospel in the middle of their own reality of life, a real inculturation of faith is achieved only in this way. Trust yourself to be Christian! Anybody who acknowledges that he/she is Christian is a “missionary”. “Mission” – this word implies that the sake of Jesus is embodied in your own person.

### **(7) Mission does not happen because the church wants it**

It is not the objective of missionary work to ensure the institution church. People are to be made believers. For this purpose, an institution is required: an institution that preserves and trades the word of God, an institution that enters into a dialogue with the beliefs of the mothers and fathers, an institution that searches for an understandable language of belief and for rituals suitable for today’s mankind. People do not need the church to be saved, but being saved they need the church.

### **(8) Mission has always an ecumenical dimension**

Mission has an ecumenical dimension because it does not fulfil the function of securing institutions. The objective is not to increase the number of members in one’s own church or congregation but to find a spiritual home for people. There is no room for evangelical piracy and conversion-by-force.

**(9) Mission and social responsibility go together**

A mission that witnesses Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom is always relevant in a social sense.

**(10) Mission is impossible without inter-religious dialogue**

In the middle of our society, the encounter with other religions is an integral part of our missionary existence. Considering the increasing advent of atheism, the main topic of such inter-religious dialogues will in future not be differences between the religions but searching for mutual values.

Louis-Ferdinand v. Zobeltitz, Pastor  
Secretary, Evangelical Church of Bremen

## **Mission and Ecumenical Movement as Chance and Future Dimension of Church and Local Congregation**

1. Ecumenical actions in individual places, the ecumenical movement in the world, a movement building bridges between different confessions – these are replies to the question whether our Christian beliefs are still valid in a post-Christian society. They open the wealth of faith, covering spirituality and Christian social service. We heard many times that we must strive to achieve unity, that we must reconcile our theological differences. But this objective seems to shrink down to an internal church affair, to a purely theological matter without regard to the needs and interests of human beings. If activities are jointly undertaken in an ecumenical spirit, no justification is needed. On the contrary: you will have to justify yourself if you maintain confessional barriers. No: it is not our duty to maintain power by perpetuating confessional structures. Duty and objective of the ecumenical movement are: preaching the Gospel, emphasising the Christian community.

2. Ecumenical behaviour and mission are fundamental attributes of the church. They are an integral part of *notae ecclesiae* (apostolic creed, belief in an all-embracing church, holiness, unity). Therefore, they are valid for the church as a whole. They have to be expressed consciously for each of its social forms. Therefore, ecumenism and mission are not optional attributes of church and pastoral actions, they are not matters to be taken up by specialists or by people who have extra motivation. They have constitutional rank being design rules embedded in the basic structure of the church statute. Therefore, they are a special task for local churches, for church districts and church managers.

3. Ecumenism and mission cannot be separated historically or materially. The ecumenical movement originated from the mission movement. The mission movement reminds the church that the whole world is the horizon for spreading the Gospel. Whereas ecumenism reminds the church never to look after itself only but to maintain lively relations and partnership to other churches in the world-wide ecumenical movement, orienting itself towards the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. It is therefore wrong to polarise between people who are interested in social ethical topics of ecumenism and people who are engaged in evangelistic missionary revival (the whole Gospel for the whole person!).

4. Facing globalisation of economic processes and consumism, this connection leads us towards the conciliar process of peace, justice and integrity of God's creation, a process that becomes most important at the beginning of a new millennium. The conciliar process paves the way for an urgently needed counter-move "from below" which frequently becomes apparent in small steps supported by personal faith and engagement. Thus, the local congregations produce new enlivening impulses for the church as a whole.

5. Thus, the essential starting point in the present discussion of principles in the conciliar process is participation. This position is taken up locally and globally by ecumenism and mission. The basis becomes personally involved, the communication between people is intensified. Acting ecumenically becomes an elemental building stone for the church of the future, a church of irrevocable participation.

6. The ecumenical learning and education process enables Christians of different confessions to become acquainted with each other locally and globally. Activated by Gospel and culture, they learn to overcome nationalism, hostility towards people of other cultures, euro-centrism. Thereby, they jointly experience the ecumenical discipleship of Christ. In this manner, ecumenical learning belongs to the educational tasks of all churches.

7. Ecumenical partnership adopts qualities, community becomes reality when people, churches and cultures meet locally and globally to consider topics of the conciliar process of peace, justice and integrity of God's creation. Therefore, it is essential for our churches to establish partnership activities in many different ways and realisations, in honest mutuality. This road guides them towards an ecumenical and missionary renewal of congregations and churches in today's society and world.

Gerd Pöppelmeier

## Is there a common mission in different contexts?

The call to a common mission echoes through all the recent reflection on the nature and purpose of mission in our times. There is hardly a document which does not address this issue, may it be the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the document on “Mission and Evangelisation – An Ecumenical Affirmation” of the WCC (1982), or the new WCC study document on “Mission in Unity Today”.<sup>1</sup> We find also, in addition to this, declarations on what is called “common witness”, formulated by the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. The most recent one has been drafted under the heading: “Towards a Common Witness” in the year 1997.<sup>2</sup>

This ecumenical document, however, relates rather to an issue that does not concern us here too much. As “A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism” it deals with a common mission of churches of different denominational traditions and not so much with partnership in mission across cultural or national boundaries. And yet, documents of this nature also emphasize the very strong conviction that mission today has to be carried out as a common – that is ecumenical – mission of all churches of Jesus Christ if it does not want to be a counter-witness to the gospel of reconciliation.

Our task here is perhaps more limited than exploring the denominational and dogmatic features and mission profiles of churches. We are not talking in general about cooperation in mission either, but we want to ponder about the question how we – as particular communities – can engage together in mission. Is there anything like a common mission in different contexts?

If I understand my task correctly, I should not try to highlight all the mission challenges we face in our diverse contexts nor should I attempt to submit very too specific proposals regarding mission efforts in our specific contexts in Africa and Germany. I am rather requested to provide some kind of a framework for the conceptualization of mission and to spell out some of the elements of a process in which we could engage in order to discover afresh our missionary calling today – our individual and contextual calling as well as our common or inter-contextual calling as partners in God’s mission. In other words, the survey I am trying to make here is a very foundational one: It leads us back to the basic questions of what mission is, how we perceive and construe mission. It may sound somewhat theoretically – and it is, in a way indeed some kind of a theory of mission -, but I hope that it will nevertheless have very practical implications enabling us to perceive even better the task we are called to carry out today as partners in mission.

In order to pursue the issues involved I would like to proceed in three steps: I will, first, speak in more general terms on church in mission, highlighting some fundamental features of the understanding of mission; I will then, secondly, speak about the church in

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<sup>1</sup> I suppose the earlier documents are well known. The study document on “Mission in Unity Today” can be found as one of the preparatory papers for the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism in Athens, May 2006, under the internet-page: [www.mission2005.org](http://www.mission2005.org), and in a new collection of documents of the WCC: “You are the Light of the World”. Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005, Geneva 2005.

<sup>2</sup> This document has been published in the April-issue of the International Review of Mission, 1999; it is also easily accessible through a search in the internet where it is placed at several internet-pages.

mission as a community of discernment, and finally I will try to map out some of the challenges for our mission – contextual and common mission – today.

## **I. Church in Mission – Participating in the Mission of God**

### **Foundational missiological convictions**

To be sure, there are different understandings of what is mission around. We all are aware that the classical interpretation of the great mission movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – of which also the North-German Mission was a part – with all its focus on the Great Commandment (Mt. 28:18-20) maintained also geographical overtones: Mission was perceived as movement that called the supposedly Christian nations of the West – Europe and North America – to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to non-Christian people outside the classical Christian territory. In the words of Gustav Warneck, the mentor of the German theory of mission around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was Christian mission understood as the total activity of Christianity that aims at planting and organising the Christian church among non-Christians. This mission would, in Warnecks view, come to an end “as soon as the sending (of missionaries) was not necessary anymore”.<sup>3</sup> There is no chance here to reflect on the various changes of the concept of mission since the – more or less classical times – of Gustav Warneck. It may be sufficient at this stage to spell out some of the basic ecumenical convictions on mission which have emerged in the continuous reflection of the church on mission during the last 50 years or so.<sup>4</sup> There are four features I would like to point out in the following.

#### **1. The Trinitarian foundation of Mission: Missio Dei**

When local churches everywhere in the world developed in the process of missionary activity, it became somewhat questionable to talk about mission as going from Christian West to the South, the land of the so-called heathen. It also became obvious that the Western churches themselves were not really as Christian as one had thought; in fact what occurred here was more and more a decline of Christendom. In the process of reconceptualisation of mission after the 2. World War one begun to see that the missionary nature of the church is not simply founded on the Great Commission, but that it has its origin in the very nature of God. It was Karl Barth who first talked about mission in relation to the triune God. God self is a missionary God: God relates to the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre. Ein missionstheoretischer Versuch. Erste Abteilung: Die Begründung der Sendung*, Gotha 1897, 2. Ed., 1. The definition reads in German language as follows: „Unter christlicher Mission verstehen wir die gesamte auf die Pflanzung und Organisation der Christlichen Kirche unter Nichtchristen gerichtete Thätigkeit der Christenheit. Diese Thätigkeit trägt den Namen Mission, weil sie auf einem Sendungsauftrag des Hauptes der christlichen Kirche beruht, durch Sendboten (Apostel, Missionare) ausgeführt wird und ihr Ziel erreicht hat, sobald die Sendung nicht mehr nötig ist.“

<sup>4</sup> I will mention at least a few titles of missiological literature which reflects the history and contemporary thinking on mission: David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll 1919; Stephen B. Bevans/Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Contexts. A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll 2004; Karl Müller/Theo Sundermeier/Stephen B. Bevans/Richard H. Bliese (Ed.), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, Maryknoll 1997; for a new evangelical missiology cf. A. Scott Moreau/Garry R. Corwin/Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions. A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey*, Grand Rapids 2004. For some new German titles cf. especially: Christoph Dahling-Sander/Andrea Schultze/Dietrich Werner/Henning Wrogemann (Ed.), *Leitfaden Ökumenische Missionstheologie*, Gütersloh 2003; Klaus Schäfer, *Anstoss Mission. Impulse aus der Missionstheologie*, Frankfurt a. M. 2003.

world, to the broken humanity, and he sends his son Jesus Christ, and God and Christ send the spirit and the triune God sends the church. Mission is therefore the mission of God. All Christian – and as such human - mission enterprise originates in God self, the source and also the critical ruler of all mission. God is a missionary God; in God's heart there is the plan to heal and reconcile, to redeem and restore the broken creation. Several quotations may underline this new vision of mission as rooted and grounded in the mission of God towards the world:

“Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people.”

“In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission... To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people.”<sup>5</sup>

The term *missio Dei*, that became prominent after the World Mission Conference at Willingen 1952, is actually a short formula, a summary of the Gospel itself: “God so loved the world that he sent his beloved son...” as we read in St. John 3:16.

This concept of mission as *missio Dei* or as mission of the Triune God was a very fundamental new view. And everything else what one has to say about the concept of mission is only an unfolding of this very nature of *missio Dei*.

## **2. The role of the church in God's mission**

A first consequence of this new teaching about mission has to do with the definition of the role of the church in mission. There are at least four things we should note here:

1. The church is the community that participates in the mission of God. The church is derived from mission, and not the other way around. Mission cannot be incidental to the life of the church. The church is the community who is founded by the mission of God; it is the instrument and purpose of God's mission. The church is the only institution that does not exist for itself, but for the people outside the church.
2. But who is the church? The church is actually the people of God as a whole. While earlier mission was considered as job of some specialized experts delegated by a mission society, it is now understood that mission is the concern of the whole people of God. The call to mission comes actually already along with the baptism of a person; every Christian and the Christian community as a whole is supposed to be in mission, giving witness for God and his kingdom.

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<sup>5</sup> David J. Bosch, *op. cit.*, 392; for the whole concept cf. *ibid.*, 389ff., and for the more recent discussion cf. St. B. Bevens/Roger P. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, 286ff.



3. Nevertheless, mission is bigger than the church. That means that God may also work outside the church, in ways we don't know and don't understand. The church is certainly the instrument of God's mission, but the church can never be arrogant about its mission. It is a humble partner in God's mission.
4. Mission cannot be reduced to conversions and church membership. God has bigger, wider things in mind: the transformation and reconciliation of the whole world, the whole creation.

### **3. The holistic horizon of God's mission**

The last aspect leads to a reflection on the goal of mission. There are various perspectives on this, of course. There are those Christians – the evangelical friends – who emphasize very strongly what they call the evangelistic mandate of the church: Mission is (exclusively) to be defined as proclamation of the gospel so that people may believe. All other activities of the church are regarded as subordinated to that mandate or regarded of less or not so urgent significance. There are, on the other hand, those who say that mission is particularly and especially – perhaps also exclusively - engagement in social action for the transformation of society. Mission is here predominantly seen as a justice concern.

It is important, however, to have a real holistic view. It is true that human beings do not live by bread alone, but humans also live by bread. It is important in mission theology to realise that God actually wants the healing and restoration of his whole creation. The purpose of mission is therefore not only the salvation of individual souls for eternal life, but of the transformation of humanity – as individuals and of societies – and even of the whole of creation. Mission has to be seen in the perspective of the kingdom of God. Therefore liberation, struggle for a just and social society is part of mission as well as inviting people to faith in Jesus Christ.

In mission theology we have come to distinguish within the one overall perception of mission a number of different dimensions. There is certainly the evangelistic dimension, but there is also the justice concern, the involvement in the struggle for human rights, the reflection and action on and as to the role of church in society etc.

Perhaps we can refer for an overall description of what mission is to the word “witness”: We are called to give witness to the Gospel. And this witness is presented to the world in different forms: in proclamation of the Gospel (kerygma), in service to people in need and to the transformation of society (diaconia), and also in our church and worship life do we as community (koinonia) already give witness to the world. The mission of the church, its witness, is therefore a holistic witness; it is grounded in the all-embracing mission of God who wants to heal and reconcile the whole world.

### **4. The contextual dimension of mission**

God's mission – and therefore also the mission of the church – is holistic, to be sure. We have to add, however, that the mission of God is at the same time very concrete. It is related to the very concrete life situations of people: The mission of the church, rooted in

the mission of God, is therefore also contextual, related to the questions, the search, the need and situation of the people it addresses.

This contextual dimension of mission can already be observed in the New Testament. That we find four Gospels is an expression of the very contextual nature in which the Gospel message addresses people. The language and style of presentation, even the terminology for the portrayal of Jesus Christ or of the ultimate reality is different in the Synoptic Gospels, in the Gospel of St. John or in the letters of the apostle Paul: In the Synoptics we find the continuous reference to the kingdom of God, in St. John we rather observe a prevalence of the word “life” to describe the gift of God and the reality of a life in communion with God, and the apostle Paul speaks preferably of justification. The messengers of the one Gospel of Jesus Christ attune their message to the needs, circumstances, cultural settings and also the different dimensions of the human predicament and the world views of people.

I think it was a major learning experience of the missiology of a more recent time, particularly of the theologies of the South, to pay a fresh attention to the context and the culture in which people live. The missionaries had a gospel what they thought is the same for everyone in every time. While this is certainly true to some extent one has also to maintain that the mission of God and the mission of the church really needs to address people very concretely, in their own life situations. And as the human predicament – the sinfulness of humanity – is found in very different expressions – in estrangement from God, lack of faith and love, but also in human misery and poverty or injustice – the Gospel message also takes different tunings and expressions. In the interaction with the cultures and life situations of people the Gospel takes on new shades, new expressions.

We are not in a position here to explore in more depth the interrelationship of Gospel and culture and the contextual nature of mission.<sup>6</sup> I only want to point out at this point that we have to be aware of the contextual nature of the Gospel. And it is important to see that the context today has actually two dimensions:

1. The context is, as the contextual theologies have taught us, really the local context, the very concrete life situation of a particular people or group of people in a specific place and time. And therefore the task of mission must also be understood first of all as a local task, the confrontation and interaction of the Gospel with a local setting. From this perception of the Gospel, that meets local people in particular context, is derived the ecumenical conviction that the primary responsibility for mission lays with the local church. Mission is, first of all, concerned with the local context.
2. But we have today also to pay attention to what we could call the global context. There are at least two reasons for stressing this aspect which was not so much addressed in recent time when the more local – African, Asian, Latin-American – theologies emerged: One reason is that the church itself is, to be sure, a local entity, but at the same time it is also part of the global, universal church, the holy catholic church. Each church is therefore called also to participate in the global mission, and work in partnership with other sister-churches. The other reason is

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<sup>6</sup> For a survey on the issue of contextuality and mission cf., for example, Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, and Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology. A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*, Maryknoll 2002.

the greater awareness we have today of the forces of globalization. We have come to realize that we live in one, globalised world and that all regions and local contexts today are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Particularly if we engage in justice issues – migration etc. – we can not only focus on local problems, but we have to take into account the external factors that contribute to local problems. The global world, the world of globalisation, is actually also the new context for mission.<sup>7</sup>

In any case it is the task of the church in mission to discover the calling of God in the local as well as in the globalised context. But how can we discover the calling of God for our local as well as global mission, our common mission here and there? This leads us to our second chapter.

## **II. Church in Mission as a community of discernment**

We should perhaps pay a little more attention to the contextual nature of mission; for it may help us to get a deeper understanding of mission. I would like to use an illustration of Andrew Walls. He draws the attention to the dazzling variety of the forms of Christianity throughout the history:

“Imagine, he says, a long-living scholar of religion from another planet who periodically receives grants to study Christianity. On his first visit the scholar encounters the newly formed community, about 37 A. D. They all are Jews, and they all practice Judaism in the light of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they expect to return imminently. A second visit several hundred years later coincides with the Council of Nicea, where the participants come from all over the Mediterranean world; non is Jewish. While the participants still reverence the Jewish scriptures, another set of writings are also used, and they are debating whether a term that does not appear in either collection of scriptures – the Greek term *homousios* – can be used to best express their faith in Jesus. Several hundred years later, the scholar’s encounter with Christianity takes place in Ireland, where monks express their faith in Jesus by performing bizarre acts of penance and who risk their lives by travelling far and wide to call rough tribes from their worship of nature gods to the worship of Jesus as God. A thousand years later, in the 1840s, the scholar visits earth again, encountering English Christians who are preparing to send missionaries to Africa, and a little over a century later our outer space visitor sees the fruit of their labours – Africans who profess Christianity but hardly in the sober way of Victorian England. These Nigerian Christians are all wearing white robes and are dancing and singing their way to church in a most effervescent and joyous way.

Could all of these people be members of the same religion? The people at Nicea honoured the Jewish books but were rather hostile to Judaism. The Irish monks mouthed the Nicene formula but had very different interests. The well-fed British missionaries still spoke of holiness, but they were hardly committed to withdrawal

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. for this aspect and the new emphasis on mission and globalisation for example, Robert J. Schreiter, *The new Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local*, Maryknoll 1977, and Klaus Schäfer, *Mission im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, in: Klaus Schäfer, *Anstoss Mission*, op. cit., 41-65.

from the world and physical penances. And the ebullient and joyful Nigerian Christians profess the same creed that the missionaries taught, but they are certainly vague about its meaning as they focus on the power of Jesus and his healing presence in their lives. All these people over the centuries called themselves Christians, but did they really share the same faith? Is there any connection between Jews who believed that Jesus was the messiah of Israel, bishop of a newly legitimated faith that spoke of this Jesus as God, scruffy monks, well-fed English clerics and spirit-filled Africans?”<sup>8</sup>

The answer that Andrew Walls gives is a yes, and this yes has to be seen on two different levels. The first level relates to the historical connection that is maintained by the spread of Christianity. Already on this level we observe some principle that is very vibrant within the Christian religion. The continuity of Christianity has obviously to do with its missionary vision. The church is missionary by its very nature; it continues as church as it continues Jesus mission of preaching, serving and witnessing to God’s already inaugurated yet still-to-be-consummated reign, growing and changing and being transformed in the process.

In other words, if to be church is to be in mission, and if to be in mission means to be responsive to the demands of the gospel in particular contexts, then the church is continually reinventing itself as it struggles with and approaches new situations, new peoples, new cultures and new questions. The existence of Christianity seems always to be linked to its expansion beyond itself, across generational and cultural boundaries. Indeed, as Walls says, “the very survival of Christianity as a separate faith has evidently been linked to the process of cross-cultural transmission.”<sup>9</sup> There seems to be an inevitable connection, therefore, between the need for Christian mission, on the one hand, and the need for that mission always to be radically contextual. The urgency of mission is linked to the urgency of change, adaptation and translation – in other words, to context. By being faithful to each context the church continues to be called forth by its Lord to share and continue his mission.

On the second level one has also to speak of some commonality between these various, contextualized and inculturated forms of Christianity. Despite the wild profusion of the varying statements of these differing groups as they respond to differing contexts, there is in Christianity an essential continuity. Despite differences of language, context and culture, there persist as well certain constants that define Christianity in its missionary nature. And if we ask what these constants are, we can and must refer to some basic Christian elements which distinguish Christianity from other religions: There is the relation to the story of Jesus Christ, of course: The person of Jesus Christ has ultimate significance for Christians. Then there is the constant use of the Bible as the source of Christian identity, and also the sacraments – the Lords Supper and baptism –, a certain understanding of salvation and a hope for the future as the eschatological consummation. In other words, there is always the relation to the Gospel what needs to be articulated afresh in the encounter with new times, new peoples, new cultures. Of course, the way,

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture*, in: *The Missionary Movement in Christian History. Studies in Transmission of Faith*, Maryknoll 1996, 3-15; quoted according to Stephen B. Bevans/Roger P. Schroeder, op. cit., 31f. In the following observations I follow Bevans and Schroeder.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

the Gospel is interpreted may be still different, but no community can get rid of the Jesus story and the Gospel if it wants to continue in the mission of the triune God.

If it is true then that there is plurality in Christianity and that the mission of the church is ever changing and that there is at the same time commonality and unity in the Gospel, I would like to take up again the question whether there is a common mission we are called to engage in together as partners in Africa and Germany? How can we perceive or construe this mission?

I certainly want to answer this question in the affirmative, but I would like most of all to spell out the way to come to an answer which we all must give together during the days here at Langeoog. My thesis is that mission is certainly a given, it is the invitation and call to participate in the mission of God which unites us and makes us partners in God's mission.

But on the other hand we have to say that the concrete forms of mission have always still and always afresh to be discovered and formulated. And a common vision for our mission together can only emerge if we perceive ourselves as a *community of discernment*. We have to discern, to discover, to define, to find what our mission today is – for each of us individually and collectively and also for us as greater community, as partners in mission. We have to engage in a process to discover that mission call for our times and our contexts.

On the basis of what I have tried to spell out so far I would like to state that there are three elements that we need to observe if we want to engage in participating in God's mission today and tomorrow.

## **1. Analysis of the context we live in**

If mission is always contextual, a response to specific needs and predicaments of people, we need earnestly to engage in an analysis of the contexts we live in. We have to study hard in order to get to know the context. We have to expose ourselves to the situations in which people live in. This has to be done in Ghana and Togo, in all of Africa, and also in Germany... and in the global community. It has to be done, for to be in mission means to be in dialogue and interaction with the people we want to address. And it is dialogue and interaction, because Godself is in dialogue and interaction with people, responding to their needs and predicaments.

The guiding question for the analysis of the context is not simply: What are the issues in society? Or: What is the particular predicament of people here? It involves the much more fundamental and theological question: What does God want us to understand? What does God want us to see and to respond to? What is the call of God in this situation? What does God require of us in this situation?

Reading the signs of the times, and being contemporaries of our people, the exposure to the realities of the world is the first requirement for a church that wants to be faithful to God's mission.

## 2. Engagement with the Gospel

I have mentioned that there are also constants in mission, a continuity that is rooted in the relation to the Gospel itself. It is therefore important that we engage in a fresh reading of the Jesus story, of the biblical text if we want to be faithful to God's mission. It is not simply reading the signs of the times as politicians do it, but it is reading the signs of the time in the light of the Gospel. What does the Gospel say and what does God call us to be and to do? What does he want to be said and articulated or to be performed in a particular context?

These two things sound very simple. But it is nevertheless important to remind us of them. To perceive our mission – our individual as well as our collective one – means to enter the circle of going to the context and trying to understand the context, and going back to the Bible and again back to the context. The one throws light on the other, the one engages the other and vice versa.

This hermeneutical circle has not always been observed in the missionary movement. Former missionaries did not always sufficiently look at the context. And the evangelical movement has perhaps sometimes still the weakness not to pay enough attention to the context. The ecumenical movement at some stage has emphasized strongly the context – “the world sets the agenda” for mission was the slogan -, but it is important to hold these two aspects and components of mission in a creative tension.<sup>10</sup>

We may formulate this tension or the two elements in various ways:

- We have to have the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, a phrase which Karl Barth has coined;
- We have to pay attention to the identity of the Gospel, but also to the relevance of the Gospel for the context;
- We could speak of mission as “Constants in Context” as Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder do in their book with the same title.

However we formulate the tension – and there are certainly more aspects we could refer to at this point – it is important to maintain that the witness to the Gospel takes always a different shape according to the context, even though it remains the same Gospel.

## 3. Ecumenical partnership in mission

The church in mission is a community of discernment, engaging in the context and in the text with the question what Gods wants us to carry out today. However, there is still a third element in the continually pursued process of discernment. This element has to do with our *partnership in mission*, and I would like to call it the *ecumenical dialogue and the ecumenical cooperation in mission*.

I have talked about the puzzling variety of forms of Christian faith and mission. This certainly has to be affirmed, because it is an expression of the contextual nature of

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<sup>10</sup> The notion of „creative tension“ is one of the central elements of the missiological reflection of David J. Bosch; cf. his *Transforming Mission*, op. cit., for example pp. 381ff.

Christian faith and mission. As a result of this contextual nature of faith we have to maintain that our mission concerns in our various contexts may be slightly different. On the other hand, we also have to see that this great variety needs to be balanced through something what we could call an ecumenical dialogue and an ecumenical responsibility.

There are basically two reasons for the necessity of an ecumenical dialogue on mission and for an ecumenical cooperation in mission. I have partly already touched on these aspects, but I want to formulate them here afresh from a little different perspective:

1. On the one hand we have to stress, that the church is not only the local church, but that the church has a universal scope; it is the catholic church, spread out over the globe. And even if there are so many expressions of the church – in denominations as well as cultural expressions – it is important that we understand one another as the universal church that God has called to witness to the world together. It has often been stressed that the denominational divisions give a counter-witness to the gospel and that is certainly true. Therefore from our very understanding of the church we need to look for a dialogue in mission and for a developing a common understanding and also, if possible, a common witness of all the churches towards the world. Jesus has reminded us in St. Johns Gospel that the ecumenical dialogue is not really a means in itself, but it is related to mission; he prayed that “they all may be one... so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). This emphasis on oneness and common witness is certainly true for all the churches, but it is even more applicable and – so to say – even more natural for churches that are bound together by a common history.
2. On the other hand we also have to speak of a certain danger of contextualized, fully inculturated gospel and mission. It was again Andrew Walls who has drawn attention to the fact that a church can also fall into “cultural captivity” and be co-opted into a culture so that it forgets the critical edge of the Gospel.<sup>11</sup> This was actually the experience of the church in Germany in the times of the Nazis, but also the church in South Africa, and perhaps in many different situations today, even in the form of a captivity of the church in consumer culture and the Gospel of prosperity. One has therefore to admit that there is also a danger of an over-inculturation of the Gospel. If this is the case a church becomes parochial, that is isolated, self-centred, tied up with cultural or nationalistic claims. Or a church thinks that it has the universal truth – as Western churches and theologians have sometimes thought – which is only another form of parochial mindsets. In any case, it should be clear that there can be blind spots, if one only pays attention to the local context.

As a consequence we should see that we need each other as partners:

- as a corrective over against the blind spots that hinder us to engage with the realities around us; we need sometimes the “charisma of the strangeness” in order to detect blind spots which only somebody from outside may be able to see;

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the article already mentioned.

- for mutual challenge and questioning;
- for accompanying and strengthening one another in our individual and common pilgrimage in mission;
- as sources of enrichment.

We speak of ecumenical learning, but also of an ecumenical discipline to engage together in the discernment what our mission is, individually and collectively.

### **III. Mapping out mission challenges: Mission in the context of globalization**

We engage here in this consultation ourselves in mapping out what our particular mission is and how we can respond to the mission challenges of our times and our situations. It is not easy for me to go very deep in concrete details of our mission, because this really needs some groundwork in contextual and global analysis in which we need to engage. And yet I would nevertheless like to give some kind of a road map of what I think are the most pressing mission concerns today, for us in our local context – each of course in a different way – and also for us together.

There are of course various ways of mapping out those mission concerns. I could, for example, refer to some of the recent missiological conferences, for example the Lausanne Forum for World evangelization 2004 in Pattaya or the World Mission Conference of the WCC in May this year in Athens. The former has, in spite of many different issues which have been taken up, affirmed that the most pressing concern still is the evangelisation of the “unreached peoples”, whereas the WCC has highlighted healing and reconciliation as the most pressing mission concerns.<sup>12</sup>

I also could point to some new missiological books. There is the very interesting one of Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder who speak of mission in the 21. Century as a mission as “prophetic dialogue” with various elements that are interrelated: Witness and proclamation, Liturgy, Prayer, Contemplation, then Justice, Peace and Integrity of creation, interreligious dialogue, inculturation and reconciliation.<sup>13</sup>

I would like to precede here in a slightly different way. In fully keeping in mind what I said about the contextuality of mission I would like to situate the mission in the context of globalisation. Of course, the consequences and results of globalization may be different in different countries, but I do think that there are common concerns which we only can address together and in which we can partner up.<sup>14</sup>

#### **1. A view at the phenomenon of globalisation**

There is hardly a Church conference today or a major paper on mission challenges for the Church in which the term “globalisation” is not mentioned. Much has already been

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview on themes and discussions of these conferences cf. the internet pages of the Lausanne Movement ([www.Lausanne.gospelcom.net/](http://www.Lausanne.gospelcom.net/)) and the World Missions Conference of the WCC at Athens ([www.mission2005.org](http://www.mission2005.org)).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Especially the concluding section of the book already mentioned: „Mission as Prophet Dialogue“, 348ff.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for a more in-depth exploration Klaus Schäfer, Mission im Zeitalter der Globalisierung, op. cit.



written about globalisation, but it is probably right to say that a description of the phenomenon remains often still rather vague and hazy and the interpretation of that phenomenon is very much contested. The German sociologist Ulrich Beck, who wrote some years ago a very informative book about globalisation, remarked there that the popular term “globalisation” in the course of its astonishing career in the last decade or so has mutated to a most effective slogan that is seldom clearly defined and often employed by different sections of society in a combative mood. Beck himself compares the efforts to define the “spongy” term globalisation with an “attempt to nail a pudding on the wall”.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the discussions around the term globalisation show – if people have not become tired of such discussions – very different and controversial assessments of the phenomenon that we have become accustomed to the name globalisation. The German theologian Karl F. Grimmer has articulated these different assessments and expectations associated with the phenomenon of globalisation in a very expressive way, highlighting from a European perspective the totally contradictory judgements:

“A ghost wanders about, not only in Europe but in the whole inhabited world. It destroys the ability of politics to make decisions. It harms democracy. It produces unemployment and poverty. It increases the rift between poor and rich. It deepens the abyss between the First and the Third or Fourth World. It destroys the ecological foundations. It takes away shelter from human beings and leads them into homelessness. It breaks up identities and reduces a human being to a figure in the economic game. The ghost is named globalisation. So it is seen by some and they ally against this ghost. The fight against it in the name of justice, freedom, peace and protection of creation.”

And then he goes on to say:

“An angel of promise wanders about, not only in Europe but in the whole inhabited world. He brings about a consciousness of living in one world. He produces wealth and labour for all. He fosters progress also for countries in underdeveloped regions of the world. He relates cultures and human beings. He lays the foundations for freedom and democracy. He is aware of ecological balance and encourages sustainable development. He works for conditions favourable for a self-realisation of persons and for a self-determined identity. The angel is named globalisation. So the others see it and herald his message. In the name of development, progress, wealth and justice they prepare his way.”<sup>16</sup>

The second assessment is, of course, found mainly in the business community, not only in Europe and North America, but in almost all parts of the world. The good and optimistic feelings that even Christian business people in the West may be expressed in a little anecdote that Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), once told. He reported that he was participating in a panel discussion on globalisation, conducted during a big Church gathering in Germany. After Raiser had

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<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung? Irrtümer des Globalismus – Antworten auf Globalisierung* (Edition Zweite Moderne), Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M. 1997, 42 and 44.

<sup>16</sup> K. F. Grimmer, *Globalisierung aus theologischer Perspektive*, in: D. Becker (Ed.), *Globaler Kampf der Kulturen?, Analysen und Orientierungen*, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln 1999, 61-80, 61.

made some critical remarks about the economic dimension of globalisation, he was addressed by a business man who said: “What do you want? We do today with our German business exactly the same thing which the Church preached for 2000 years: ‘Go ye in the entire world...’”

While globalisation is here perceived as a blessing – of course, it remains to be asked for whom this blessing actually is -, there are other, dissenting voices for which globalisation rather represents a curse. Most of these voices are raised in countries of the Southern hemisphere, but not only there. There is a broad Anti-Globalisation movement today, organized in such organisations as ATTAC (Association for taxation of financial transactions for the benefit of citizens), that strive for what they perceive as an alternative globalisation, “a globalisation of resistance and struggles” against global forces that enslave people all over the world.<sup>17</sup>

These very different readings of the phenomenon of globalisation already indicate that globalisation is a very complex phenomenon. Before we come to our own judgement of the effects and impacts of globalisation we should therefore pause and try to describe at least some of the complexities associated with this phenomenon.

Globalisation is, in short, the process of compression of time and space, a loosening of boundaries and a process of global integration. This process is by no means entirely new, but it is evident that the notion of living in “one world” has entered the human consciousness in a way unknown in the past. The process of integration into one world has in recent years unfolded such a speed and an irresistible force that one does not go wrong to speak of an epochal transformation in the history of human civilization.

The complex dynamics of the process of globalisation lay perhaps in two features:

1. One has, first, to take note of the fact that globalisation is a *multifaceted phenomenon*. The process shows different dimensions which are certainly closely intertwined but should nevertheless for reasons of clarity be distinguished. I name here only the most important dimensions:

- *Economic dimension*: Globalisation has to be understood in the context of liberalisation of the economy, national as well as the international economy. Globalisation means the integration of the markets into a single world market, it allows the free flow of capital, the transfer of the process of production of goods from one place to another, global purchase and sale etc. In short, globalisation has to do with the global expansion of the capitalist market economy, and there are many people today to either perceive this dimension as the centre and driving force of globalisation or define globalisation exclusively from this particular aspect.
- *Communication dimension*: The process of globalisation is made possible and accelerated through the new speed of communication; information from any place in the world is accessible in (nearly) real time (almost) literally everywhere is the world through TV, telephone, e-mail, internet. The “Word Wide Web” is the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. for example Francois Houtart and Francois Polet (Ed.s), *The Other Davos. Globalization of resistances and struggles*, Christava Sahitya Samithi, Thiruvalla, November 2000.

symbol of a global integration that makes the entire world to “one single place” in which time and space don’t seem to count anymore.

- *Political dimension:* The significance of nation states and the ability of national governments to exercise control over processes and to direct their own affairs as sovereign entities has tremendously weakened in the process of globalisation. Even if the last word about the future of nation states and the role of national politics may not have been said yet, it is nevertheless evident that the strength of national governments – or any national agents – to be in charge of one’s own affairs has decreased in favour of other, trans-national forces and so-called global players.
- *Cultural dimension:* Globalisation also has a tremendous impact on cultures; it shakes the boundaries that so far have separated cultures from one another and unleashes cultural dynamics of a new kind.

2. A closer look at the last aspect leads to an even greater awareness of the complexity of the process of globalisation. The *cultural dynamics*, emerging in the process of globalisation, can not be reduced to one denominator. There are at least three entirely different patterns of cultural forces at work. Mostly – and this is the first pattern – the cultural dimension of globalisation is perceived as the *global extension of a Western, especially North-American type of culture* with its particular values expressed in typical life styles of individualism and consumerism. The catch word for this cultural dynamic is “MacWorld”, and we observe its force everywhere in the promotion of certain consumer goods such as McDonalds, Coca Cola, MTV, Western pop music, sports, Western clothing etc. This pattern of cultural universalisation – the extension of so-called Western cultural values, often promoted for the sake of profit – leads without doubt towards a cultural *homogenisation and uniformisation* of the world.

However, besides this powerful cultural force we observe also – and that is the second pattern – *a new awareness of the local and the particular*. We find – even in the West – a new interest in the local language, local history and customs, and we observe counter movements against this trend of homogenization that draw on ethnic, national, cultural, religious resources. Sometimes those sentiments give way to different types of ethnic, nationalistic, nativistic or fundamentalist reactions against the powerful homogenizing trend that is perceived as a force threatening to erode if not extinguish traditional identities. One may describe these phenomena in such a way that one distinguishes between “globalisation” on the one hand as a force of homogenization with the tendency to erase all cultural differences, and “*fragmentation*” on the other hand, as a counter force affirming and defending the particular and local. Benjamin Barber has labelled these conflicting trends as “Jihad versus MacWorld”. But one should keep in mind that both these trends are only the two sides of the same coin and remain aware that the process of globalisation itself is connected with extraordinary complex cultural dynamics. Globalisation does not only mean homogenisation of the world, but it nourishes, in a dialectical and perhaps even in an ironical way, also pluralist tendencies; it is in fact a force that stirs up *pluralism*.

However, the cultural dynamics of globalisation are even still more complex. We have not only the opposition of the powerful trend towards homogenization on the one hand – the Western “MacWorld” - and the counter trends emphasizing the local culture on the other

hand which may lead to a fierce “clash of cultures”. The process of globalisation also brings a weakness and even an erosion of cultural boundaries, so that a *continuous interaction and exchange between different cultural worlds* emerges with greater strength than ever before in human history. This process of a mutual impact of cultures on one another also changes the Western culture; McDonalds also needs “Mexican Weeks” or “Asian Weeks”, where supposedly Mexican or Chinese food is being served, in order to satisfy the exotic sentiments of people; Western music, too, is in reality not a Western product but a mix of very different musical styles derived from diverse cultures, with Afro-American, Cuban, Caribbean or African elements. What we in fact observe is the appearance of very new forms of culture. One could describe them as transnational forms of life in which the global and the local are mixed and have taken on new amalgamations. The global and the local dimensions are therefore not only in opposition, but they also stand in continuous interaction in which a new cultural world is being created or constructed. What emerges out of this continuous process of negotiating cultures in their interaction are *cultural hybrids*, mixtures of cultures, and the result is that much of the global culture is – so to say – essentially a “*syncretistic*” culture. Donald Robertson characterizes this phenomenon of mutual exchange, interaction between and mixture and new constructions of cultures as “*globalisation*”, an artificial word that is formed out of the combination of globalisation and localisation.

Perhaps it would be helpful to give at this point an illustration of the complexities of globalisation. The famous British historian Eric Hobsbawm has once said there is nothing what could illustrate globalisation better than the development of the soccer – or football – sport in the last 10 years – a statement that certainly appeals to me as one of those Germans who are fond of football. “The growth of a world market”, he said, “has enabled such a fast communication that the same TV programme or the same move can be watched on any place in the world at the same time. This developments means that live transmissions of events such as football games have become global entertainment happenings in which teams are not necessarily associated anymore with a particular country or a particular city. There is a global pool of players who can be recruited from anywhere in the world and they can be placed in any team or at any spot as we have seen in the past only with famous opera divas or conductors of music.” Hobsbawm is certainly right when he points out that the rules for the soccer game remain nevertheless standardized all over the world: “a football match between Japan and Malaysians played according to the same rules as a game between so old and honourable clubs as Juventus Turin and Internazionale Milano.” However, one has to add two aspects which Hobsbawm does not mention: The culture of the playing is at least in German football teams dramatically changed – usually to the better – when there are now also African, Brazilian and Asian – the Hamburg football team just has purchased a player from Japan – players are part of the teams. While this is actually meant by “globalisation” one should also point out that these games are associated with big business. In Hamburg we just have seen that two multi-millionaires, one from Finland and the other one from the USA, joined hands and constructed in Hamburg a multi-functional hall with 15.000 seats; and they bought themselves an ice-hockey team from Munich, renamed it as an Hamburg team and placed it in the new hall in Hamburg, added a few good players from the USA, Canada and Eastern European countries and make millions and millions of Euro with it. And people in our city enjoy this type of fun and entertainment culture that in reality is a

big capitalist venture. This shows that cultural and economic dimensions are closely linked in the process of globalisation.

From this very brief and rather rough sketch of the phenomenon of globalisation it should be clear that globalisation is indeed a process that raises new and fundamental questions for the mission of the church. But what exactly are these questions and the challenges inherent in them for the Church? How do we need to articulate and perform the mission of the church in a time of globalisation?

I would like to address these questions related to the missionary dimension of the church in reference to three areas of globalisation which are all connected with the issue of identity. In view of the problem of globalisation and marginalisation we have to raise the question what the value of human beings really is; in the context of new quests for identity, emerging in the time of globalisation, we have to elaborate how the Gospel, celebrated by and entrusted for sharing with others to the church, may contribute to the identity formation of people; and in the context of identity conflicts and violence we have to articulate afresh the reconciling dimension of the Christian message.

## **2. Globalisation and marginalisation: Mission as solidarity**

If we turn to the question of mission concerns in the horizon of globalisation, we will seldom here voices who identify globalisation as an “angel of promise” or as a general blessing for the world. There are certainly efforts towards a differentiated perception of the phenomenon – the book of Robert J. Schreiter on the “The New Catholicity” is perhaps the best example of it -, but in Church circles we hear predominantly critical voices, particularly in regions of the Southern hemisphere and in ecumenical reflections on current missionary challenges.<sup>18</sup>

The reason for this rather critical perception of globalisation lies, of course, in the concrete experience people make with the phenomenon of globalisation. Globalisation goes along with marginalisation<sup>19</sup>: This observation sums up the experience of many people, not only in India, but also in other countries, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America and to an ever increasing extent also in the North. Theologians in Latin America have coined the term “*the excluded*” in order to describe the reality of experience of people who have become victims of the process of globalisation. The term “*exclusion*” does not only refer to a situation which drives people ever deeper into poverty, but excludes them definitely from the participation in the economic process. Because people have not been trained for the modern forms of production or because the new forms of production does not need so much labour force as in the past, and because the poor don’t have the purchasing power to secure for themselves all these wonderful luxury goods they have become superfluous. One simply does not need them anymore, they are now useless.

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<sup>18</sup> As examples for an evaluation of globalisation in a theological perspective from the South, particularly from Asia, cf. for example: M. G. Chunakara (Ed.), *Globalization and its Impact on Human Rights*, Hongkong/Tiruvalla 2000; T. Balasuriya, *Globalization and Human Solidarity*, Thiruvalla 2000; S. J. Samartha, *Globalization and its Cultural Consequences – A Theological Response*, in: D. Chetti/M. P. Joseph (Ed.s), *Ethical Issues in the struggle for Justice. Quest for pluriform Communities. Essays in Honour of K. C. Abraham*, Tiruvalla 1998, pp. 182-195; E. G. Singh, *Globalization and Contextualization: Towards a new Awareness of one’s own Reality*, in: *Exchange* 29:4, 2000, 361-372.

<sup>19</sup> K. C. Abraham, op. cit., 143.

Against the background of these experiences the globalisation appears only as an extended form of capitalism. Globalisation – to be precise: the economic dimension of globalisation – appears to be a new form of colonialism and imperialism, pushed forward now not anymore by the powerful states of the West themselves but by multi-national companies who have, in alliance with local elites, only their profit in mind. And the new media, particularly the TV with the suggestive offer of a beautiful life to be gained through the purchase of the consumer goods, represent for many thoughtful people in countries of the South only a form of “cultural invasion” shattering the value system of the traditional society. Through this process, which actually shows once more the intertwining of the capitalist and cultural dimension of globalisation, there is a new international elite being created that wants to enjoy a life in luxury without being concerned about the destiny of the poor. Felix Wilfred has talked in this context of a new “*amnesia of the poor*” and “the progressive *eclipse of social consciousness and responsibility* in the country.”<sup>20</sup>

But in theological reflections on the impact of globalisation of the life of people it has been pointed out that the forces of the capitalist market are not only an “instrument of oppression”, but that there is even more behind it. What is happening through the unbridled forces of the market and the one-dimensional consumerism is actually a reduction of a human being to a pure “homo oeconomicus”, treating him or her simply as a “thing”. This is, however, not only a betrayal of the human dignity of each individual person; it also represents a form of idol worship. The Conference for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held 1996 in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, has found clear words for this attitude:

“We call upon the churches to examine the meaning of the gospel and its values vis-à-vis the destructive forces of globalization and the market. The Christian claims concerning the sovereignty of God stand in opposition to the totalitarian pretensions of the market economy. Christians must declare their opposition on theological grounds to any idolization or absolutization of the market. The messianic claims of the market and the consumerist life-style are in sharp conflict with the Christian confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. The churches should not be intimidated by globalization and cultural imperialism, but rather should confront the ‘centres of power’ with the power of the Gospel.”<sup>21</sup>

The Central and Latin American theologians and economists Hugo Assman and Franz Hinkelammert go even a step further in their critical theological analysis. They not only speak of the “idol of the market”, but describe with passionate expression the brutality of this idol that sacrifices millions of poor people on its altar.

I think that these and similar statements formulate indeed some of the central challenges for the mission of the church in our time. Looking at globalisation from the perspective

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<sup>20</sup> Felix Wilfred, Church’s Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalization, Paper presented at the General Body Meeting of the Catholic Council of India, Bangalore, December 14-16, 1997; the paper is available on the internet on the Homepage of SEDOS, Rome. Italics in the original.

<sup>21</sup> Quote from the Report of Section II of the Conference dealing with: “Gospel and Identity in Community”; Christopher Duraisaingh (Ed.), Called to One Hope – The Gospel in Diverse Cultures, WCC Publications, Geneva 1998, 51f.

of the losers of globalisation – in fact, of the victims of globalisation – we have to respond for the conceptualisation of the missionary task of the church to three basic questions: 1) Where is the place of the Church today? 2) What is the message of the church in this context? and 3) What are the strategies of the church today? I am only able at this point to give short responses to these questions without elaborating on all the theological and practical implications:

1. *Where is the place of the Church today?*

In the Southern hemisphere, where today most of the Christians live and where the impact of globalisation is experienced in a devastating way, the Church of today is the Church is primarily the “Church of the poor” or – if the majority of people are not members of the Church – “Church among the poor”. This provides a perception of globalisation that comes out of the experience of marginalisation and suffering. The Church will therefore, almost naturally, be a voice and an advocate of the poor, and she will draw attention to the destructive and even deadly effects of globalisation.

2. *What is the message of the Church?*

There are several answers to this question. One has first to emphasize that a “Church of the poor” and a “Church among the poor”, a Church that is deeply rooted in the cultures of the poor in Asia, Africa and Latin America, is conscious that there exist different values among humanity than the values associated with profit making and consumerism. The culture of so many other indigenous peoples in various parts of the world still rejoice in such values of human dignity, humanity, community, solidarity, spirituality, and the Church will do well to uplift these values and draw on them in order to generate alternative models of development, different from the dominant pattern of the global market economy.

The Church will then, of course, also articulate and actualize afresh the Biblical message that is entrusted to her. This message has a twofold component: The Church will remind the world on the biblical vision of the justice and righteousness of God who wants to grant the fullness of life for all people. The living God, who liberated his people out of the house of slavery in Egypt, does not know marginalisation and exclusion, for he is a God of solidarity with the poor. The Church has received and celebrates the message of Jesus Christ who proclaimed the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God for all people, but particularly for the poor. The Christian mission is a witness to this message of the unconditional love of God towards the downtrodden and marginalized, and it is a reminder of the right of human beings to live a life in dignity, justice and freedom. And at the same time – this is the second aspect in the Biblically informed witness of the Church that is most significant in our time of globalisation – the Church will to have to critique the unbridled globalisation and the thrive for profit, consumerism, fun and entertainment connected with it. There is no use in demonizing globalisation, but there is every need to remind people that the meaning of life will not be found in material goods alone, particularly not if the thirst for such goods does not care for the well-being of the entire community. The Gospel for the poor, and the prophetic critique of globalisation are essential elements of the witness of the Church.

### *3. What are the strategies of the Church?*

In its practical ministry will the church, locally and globally, seek ways to contribute to and participate in the building up of a consciousness of solidarity and in the formation of networks of solidarity. The church is certainly not the only force that is concerned about the negative and deadly effects of globalisation; there are in fact many networks and social movements striving for another globalisation. But the church, also a “church of the poor” and a “church among the poor” with its local setting and global representation has a special capacity to encourage another, an alternative form of globalisation. The church as a global missionary movement for solidarity is called to contribute from the resources of its own traditions to the search for alternative models of globalisation. “Building of communities of resistance and solidarity with... people’s movement is important. Such relationships will bring about a culture of solidarity in the place of culture of exclusion and a culture of life in the place of culture of death and violence.”<sup>22</sup> This then is a form of cooperation in a common mission.

### **3. Globalisation and the Quest for Identity: Mission as Witness to a new Identity**

After we have focused on the missionary concern in relation to the economic dimension of globalisation we have now to move on to a brief exploration on the cultural dimension. My assumption is here, first of all, that globalisation brings about a new quest for identity which we have to address if we meaningfully want to respond to our missionary calling in the time of globalisation. There are actually individual and collective aspects in the quest for identity.

I would like to narrate a little illustration that might help us to grasp what is at stake. The illustration comes from a context that might be very strange to us, but it will nevertheless help us to better understand the dynamics of globalisation. The following story has been told by Gottfried Brakemeier, a Lutheran theologian from Brazil:

“When a candidate for theological studies in the Lutheran seminary in Sao Leopoldo (Brazil) was asked about the church affiliation of his parents, he answered that his father is a Catholic, his mother actually stems from the Anglican church but is currently active in a Pentecostal denomination, while he himself was engaged in the youth group of a Lutheran congregation. It would have been no surprise if he had added that his brother had joined a spiritistic movement and his sister the Afro-Brazilian cult of Candomblé.”<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, these examples are typically Brazilian, where we find a great variety of religious groups with multiple forms of belonging and frequent shifts of affiliations. The Indian situation is somewhat different and still more characterized by traditional loyalties.

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<sup>22</sup> Christopher Duraisingh, Editorial to an issue of IRM on “Gospel and Identity in Community” with preparatory material for the work in Section II of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 1996), IRM Vol. LXXXV No. 336, January 1996, pp. 1-9, p. 8f.

<sup>23</sup> Gottfried Brakemeier, Zur weltweiten Krise von Gesellschaft und Kirche. Eine Standortbestimmung, in: Dieter Becker, op. cit., pp. 13-23, p. 13.



And yet, this illustration may help us to recognize essential aspects of the situation of human beings in an age of globalisation. I note three observations:

1. Biographies of people don't necessarily follow the tracks laid out by the family or the social group; tradition is not the natural determination for biographies anymore;
2. there are numerous proposals for a life concept of people, religious as well as non-religious or semi-religious ones;
3. a person must choose from among these various proposals; a person must somehow – in the West certainly more than in India, but this feature is also found in India today – “invent” his or her own life.

With these observations, which actually all relate to the issue of identity formation, we have three key issues so characteristic for the age of globalisation: Break of tradition, pluralism (that is, there exist a number of options for my identity), individualisation (that is, a person is master of one's own life). These words, so typical for the Western world, have not been introduced in the time of globalisation, but it is evident that globalisation accelerates processes of the break-up of traditions, the perception of pluralism, and the necessity to choose my identity out of a number of options available to me. The pressure which globalisation puts on cultural traditions that have formerly provided meaning, orientation and security to individuals and communities has increased through the interaction of cultural worlds. We can observe this phenomenon particularly in societies that have exercised great appreciation for traditions, and that today experience great irruptions of the traditional life-styles through the communication of the virtual worlds of the TV or through mass tourism. Indeed, this encounter and interaction with something that is alien, strange, irritating, and that might have – particularly for young people – at the same time a certain fascination and attractiveness, can lead to a serious disruption of the traditional ethos. The interaction of cultural worlds, so characteristic of globalisation, forces people to look afresh who they actually are, what they want to be. Globalisation brings about a quest for identity.

At this point it becomes once more evident that the traditional concepts of culture are increasingly called into question. Culture constitutes much less than in the past a more or less homogeneous unit. The accelerated contact of cultures taking place in the process of globalisation, the exchange of cultural worlds and the interaction of cultural streams, systems of meaning and life-styles leads to a continuous process of cultural deconstruction and reconstruction, of reshaping of cultures. The old “integrated concepts of culture” favoured by anthropologists and cultural sociologists are being replaced by – what Robert J. Schreier calls – “globalize concepts of culture”.<sup>24</sup> That this has dramatic implications for the issue of inculturation can in this context only be mentioned in passing.

It is obvious that this new situation of cultural contact and the strongly felt necessity of negotiating identity is a very ambivalent phenomenon. This process that somehow throws individuals and groups into a whirl-pool of cross-cultural dynamics opens up on the one hand new spaces of freedom and self-determination. At the same time, however, it must be seen that the weakening of traditional plausibility structures and systems of meaning

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Robert J. Schreier, *The New Catholicity*, op. cit., 46ff.

and belonging puts stress on individuals and groups; unease, a sense of insecurity and risk, psychic stress are some of the reactions which go along with this process.

That this situation with its impact on individuals and collectives represents tremendous challenges for the mission of the church is obvious. We live in an age in which individuals and communities are exposed to dramatic and not seldom traumatic transformations, in which identities are being disintegrated and traditional societies or milieus are melting and people seek for themselves for new orientation in life. The church is called to respond to this situation and witness to resources of identity formation that are drawn from the Gospel of the love of God revealed in Christ as well as from life-sustaining cultures of indigenous traditions.

How this witness has to be articulated and lived out may be very different in the various contexts of the world. This witness will not simply be a straight-forward proclamation of the Gospel, but it will be sensitive to the cultural and religious traditions of the people of the land and relate the message of the Gospel, which provides identity for the Christian community, to those traditions. But the Church is nevertheless called articulate and live out the Gospel of Christ and to draw attention to the values of the kingdom of God. Where identity is being shaped and reshaped today and where there are increasingly conflicts around identity issues, the Church must be present and articulate the vision of the Gospel of Christ and the dignity and identity people may find in the Gospel. In such situations where identity is being negotiated afresh – and perhaps contested – Christians are asked to give an account of the hope that is within them (cf. 1. Peter 3:15).

This also is a field for individual as well as common witness. Perhaps one has to acknowledge today that while the church and missionaries of the West have formerly often proclaimed the Gospel in Africa, it is now the time for Africans to proclaim the Gospel here in the West. While the people in the West may think they already know everything about the church and the Gospel – and therefore don't care for it – it may be that the voices from Africa sound fresh for them and for us today.

#### **4. Globalisation and Identities in Conflict: Mission as Reconciliation**

The new awareness for the particular and the local, which I mentioned earlier, has indeed to do with the question of identity. In the turn to the particular we find a quest, sometimes even a deep yearning of people for certainty and even for security, for orientation and belonging. This new quest for identity is certainly a positive factor, for human beings need a sense of belonging, a feeling of familiarity and assurance to participate in a system of meaning and to be part of a community. This is, by the way, in my view also the reason why the caste system in India has still prevailed in spite of its ugly face that should otherwise be so obvious for any human being that looks at it.

While the quest for and affirmation of identity in itself has certainly positive value, we must also pay attention to a very problematic aspect of identity formation. Identity is today not only affirmed – reformulated or defended - in an appeal on one's own tradition and cultural resources, but identity is also articulated in difference to others. Demarcation from the others, the strangers, the outsiders, is a feature that has certainly always been there in human history. But I think it should be acknowledged that this phenomenon has

increased and almost has become a hallmark of the age of globalisation. From my own background as a European I would like to refer to former Yugoslavia as an example of this situation: After the collapse of the hegemonic Soviet system in Eastern Europe we saw a dramatic break-down of nation states. Almost all of a sudden there were Serbs again and Croats, Bosnians and Kosovo Albanians and still some other nationalities in what seemed to have been formerly a unified Yugoslavian nation state. Serbs stood against Croats, and fought out a terrible war; Serbs also fought against Bosnians, and all rediscovered and reaffirmed their own identity. Moreover, Serbs are of Orthodox faith, Croats are Catholics, Bosnians are (usually) Muslims. Identity and difference – “We” and “the Others” – is one of the new problematic issues that has become new actuality in an age of globalisation. And identity and difference is a theme associated with conflict and even with violence. Yugoslavia again is an example for it, but we may also refer to conflicts between Hindus and Muslims and Hindus and Christians in India, we may look at the struggles of Muslims versus Christians in Indonesia, in the Sudan, in Nigeria and elsewhere, we may point to the violent conflicts between Tamilians and Singhalese – the ones usually Hindus, the others Buddhists – in Sri Lanka, and we should not forget the terrible genocide between Hutus and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi. Of course, one should not simply blame globalisation for all of these conflicts – some are much older than the new phase of globalisation -, but there can be no doubt that globalisation accelerates these tensions. And if we ever need a prove for that we have to look at the international level where we have today, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, a very dangerous and complex global scenario that is interpreted by different people in different ways. While the new “National Security Strategy of the United States of America”, issued in September 2002 speaks of “Us and Our Friends” as against forces of global terrorism, and President George W. Bush speaks of the “axis of evil”, and American citizens have in general become very suspicious of Islam, we have on the other side voices of discontent and harsh criticism of US policies, whether they come from the anti-globalisation movement or whether they come from sections of the Islamic world. The theses of Samuel P. Huntington of the “clash of civilizations”, articulated long before the terrible attacks in New York and Washington and later in Bali, have gained new prominence. Whether all these voices represent an appropriate reading of the world situation today or not, it is clear that they all follow the same pattern of a sharp differentiation between “We” and “the Others”.

1. I think the churches should pay much more attention to the issues of conflicts and violence emerging from identity issues than it has done in the past. The first important step for that is to study those conflicts in depth, to try to understand the complexities of these conflicts and look on the basis of such a study for remedies and features of for an appropriate ministry of the church. Such claims for a deeper engagement in conflict situations are increasingly made today, and the statement that Ralph Premdas in conclusion of an compelling article on ethnic conflicts in a number of countries may stand as an example for a demand that should not be restricted to specific ethnic conflicts but to identity conflicts in general:

“The leaders of the churches will have to take the issue of ethnic conflict more seriously. Of utmost importance is a better understand of the social, political and theological factors involved. The churches will have to appoint committees that investigate the historical origin of the conflict, examine the social scientific

literature on ethnic conflicts, study the theory and practice of conflict resolution, and devise instruments of popular education that raise people's awareness of the issues at stake and communicate the biblical message of reconciliation."<sup>25</sup>

2. Christians will also have to ask themselves about their own role in such conflicts. Are Christians only victims of conflicts or are they not sometimes also part of the problem?

Two very different examples may show that Christians themselves may become entangled in violent conflicts – sometimes directly and active, sometimes rather indirectly in so far as they are unduly blamed for being the responsible force for conflicts:

“The best catechists, those who filled our churches on Sundays, were the first to go with machetes in their hands”, reported a Catholic bishop from Rwanda about the genocide in his country. And an observer noted: “There is absolutely no doubt that significant numbers of prominent Christians were involved in the killings, sometimes slaughtering their own church leaders.”<sup>26</sup> May this situation in Rwanda, one of the most evangelized countries in Africa and with Christians on both sides of the civil war, refer to a confusion of loyalties between Christian faith and ethnic affiliation, we find a quite different pattern in the recent conflicts between radical Hindu nationalists and Christians in India. Radical Hindu nationalist hold the supposedly aggressive conversion strategies of Christians responsible for the unrest among the people and even for the atrocities committed against Christians; as a result there are attempts from the side of the nationalists – and the government is today part of it – to put a check on the Christian influence and to curb activities which supposedly lead to conversions. The churches, of course, deny such a responsibility of stirring up communal unrest – and rightly so. But on the other hand, the churches also observe with concern Christian groups – often free-lance missionaries from the USA and from South Korea – who indeed exhibit a questionable style of missionary activity that not only damages the image and integrity of the churches, but that also contributes indeed to communal tensions. At least those Christians who are very insensitive and aggressive in their missionary outreach and who don't care at all for ecumenical discipline and respect towards other religions are part of the problems we face in India, Indonesia, Eastern Europe, in the Sudan, Nigeria and many other parts of the world. We all are aware that the issues are complex, but the only point I want to make at this stage of our reflection is that the churches themselves are getting entangled in identity issues, whether they want it or not. And the world expects from the Church a response and a clear statement about the identity of its ministry and mission in a given society and in the world at large.

3. This leads itself to the last remark: The Church is in need to define afresh what the right understanding of mission is. Christian mission is indeed supposed to be solidarity with the poor – the victims of globalisation -, and it is also sharing a message which brings life to people and helps them to affirm their identity; but mission must also be a bid for reconciliation, a search for community and partnership. Mission in the midst of conflicts must be reconciling mission, mission as reconciliation.

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<sup>25</sup> R. Premdas, *The Church and Ethnic Conflict in the Third World*, in: *The Ecumenist*, 1994, 53-56, 56.

<sup>26</sup> Quotations taken from Miroslav Volf, *The Social Meaning of Reconciliation*, unpublished paper, Osiek 1998, 1.

This is certainly not a concern for the local churches, but for the Church at large. It was therefore, I felt, necessary that the organisation I work for in the year 2000 in the light of reflections about mission as possible cause for tensions in Asia issued a letter to all our partners – churches and church organisations – in Asia stating how we understand mission today:

“We hear that the issue of mission and conversion and the presence of free-lance missionaries in some countries in Asia contribute to the heated debate about the integrity of the churches mission. We would therefore like to make it clear that we, the members of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) who are involved in partnership in mission with many churches in Asia, sincerely discard any form of mission in a `crusading spirit`. We certainly regard the obligation to mission as integral part of the Christian identity, but we affirm mission as `Mission in Christ's Way`, seeking the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden and the sharing of all in the horizon of the kingdom of God. We are certainly not committed to conquer countries, humiliate other religious, destroy cultures, insult the sentiments of people; in our witness to Christ we are committed to respect and to embrace, to uplift and to heal, to share and to reconcile!”<sup>27</sup>

My conviction is that the essential identity of the Church is rooted in the story of God reconciling and healing a fragmented and broken world in Jesus Christ. Our existence as a Christian community in this world, our ministry and our mission has to reflect this narrative of reconciliation and must be a mission of reconciliation.

#### **IV. Closing Remarks**

Is there a common mission in various contexts? The answer at the end of our survey is: Yes, there is a common mission. This mission is rooted in the love of God and in the mission of the triune God. The contexts we live in may be different, and each church is called to pay serious attention to its own context. But we need each other to help one another to become a community of discernment how is attentive for the calling of God in our times. And we need each other for cooperation in mission – to be faithful as God's people who share the Gospel of justice and solidarity with the poor and needy, to help people to discover their identity as beloved children of God, and as reconciler in the way of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Klaus Schäfer  
Executive Secretary for Theology of the EMW  
(Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany)

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<sup>27</sup> Signed by the chairperson of the EMW-Board, Bishop Maria Jepsen, and published along with other papers and documents of the EMW General Assembly, September 2000 in EMW Information Nr. 124, 60f.

## Project Gratis Shop

Kristian Stemmler wrote an article in the magazine „Junge Kirche 2/01“, reporting a visit in the „Gratis Shop“ in Hamburg. This is where it all started. The idea was developed by a study group “local economy” in Hamburg. It is easy and convincing: If somebody needs for instance clothing, household goods, or decoration items, he is allowed to take up to three items free of charge (gratis) from the Gratis Shop. If a person owns things which he/she does not need, they can be left at the shop. Inside the shop, you can develop contacts and talk to other persons while having a cup of tea or coffee.

A church elder who had read the article asked “would that be an idea for us?” – Yes, we quickly agreed, it was. Since March 2002, you will now find the “Meeting Point Gratis Shop” in the middle of a congregation district – on one side there are apartment houses housing a large proportion of “lately resettled immigrants” or foreigners; on the other side, beautiful single-family homes.

The shop operates according to the so-called “Detmold concept”. It was developed by a small initiative group after a visit in Hamburg, prior to the opening of the Gratis Shop. The Evangelical Reformed Church Congregation Detmold-West is the legal owner, but the Catholic and the Evangelical Methodist Church Congregations were enlisted as supporters.

In the beginning, people were doubtful: will the project be successful? Will the rent for the shop be too expensive? But after only one year, it was clear: the people living in the district did accept the project. They like to visit the shop. Some regulars are looking forward to the cup of coffee and to the talks which they will have. “In most cases, the day when the shop is open is the only day when I leave my home” narrates a lady visitor. Even people from distant areas drop in to deliver articles or because they need something or because they like the idea.

The operation of the shop is financially supported by a gift of one Euro which we ask visitors to deposit at the exit. In the meantime, a second room was rented additionally to offer more room for a round table with chairs.

A large number of persons supports the project on a voluntary basis. They make sure that all articles are attractively and clearly arranged in the shelves and cupboards and that the table is laid nicely. The task of the voluntary helpers is demanding, every time the large stream of visitors flows in during shop opening times. Visitors of many varieties, of whom every one must be welcomed. This is not always easy. Sometimes the observance of the rules must be enforced, especially the rule that not more than three items may be taken home.

The voluntary helpers of the Gratis Shop team meet regularly, to deal with any practical subjects and to discuss problems. Learning processes within the team are exciting. The basic rule that things are really to be given away free-of-charge is discussed again and again. An example: somebody donated a really valuable silver set. Everybody knows: if the set was sold, we could use the proceeds to finance a substantial portion of our shop rent. “This would be a big advantage. We need no longer be anxious for donations to bear our costs.” This is a good argument. “No, you missed the main point. We do not consider the monetary value of an article. A silver set can be as useful as a teddy bear”, contributes another lady. Again and again we experience during these shop meetings how difficult it is to act contrary to the community’s usual way of thinking. We notice how our thinking is frequently dominated by categorising things according to their monetary value. But so far we did stick to our principle of running a genuine free-of-charge shop. It is surprising for us all to notice how an apparently unsolvable problem is suddenly solved by the discussions during the shop meeting. For instance: immediately after opening the shop, there was a difficulty threatening the survival of the shop. During opening hours, there were occasionally 80 children without their parents. They disturbed the operation of the shop to such

an extent that it became impossible to select or to deliver articles in an orderly fashion. It was difficult to find a solution. On one side, we did not want to exclude the children. On the other hand, there was such a chaos that the shop really would have to be closed. During our talks, an idea came up: "Once a month, let us open the shop only for children." Since then, we have a children day on the first Tuesday of each month when specifically the toys are presented. Each child is allowed to independently choose one item, donating 10 cents in return. On some days, more than 100 children come to the shop.

It is indeed fascinating to find a mutual solution to a problem which had originally seemed unsolvable. With many persons involved, it sometimes takes more time to find a way that satisfies everybody. But it is a good experience to learn how to find better solutions in a team. How often do people think that they have to solve problems by themselves? Some of the voluntary helpers have much experience in team work because they are engaged in many other activities. For others, the process of deciding mutually is a new experience. During the shop meetings, one has to learn that all arguments have to be brought forward before decisions can be made; that one person has to talk after the other, not all at the same time. The team finds itself and develops common cause again and again, keeping in mind that our Gratis Shop team itself consists of women of different social levels. Wives of medical doctors cooperate with recipients of social benefits. They become intimately acquainted to each other and develop intensive understanding for the other person's problems which quite frequently looked remote before. The encounter increases mutual understanding.

The same is true in the relation between helpers and visitors. All participants come to know each other better and better, keeping in mind that most visitors appear frequently. They start talking about themselves. "I should like to know more about the cultural background of the visitors", said one of the women helpers in a shop meeting. "For instance, I know very little about the Kurds and the role of their women." Or: "How did the lately resettled immigrants live in Kazakhstan?" Social questions become apparent when meeting people: "What are the changes brought forward by Hartz IV? How does it affect people who are already now receivers of social benefits?" As a result of such questions, a Hartz IV information meeting was offered, and indeed: many visitors from the shop who had never set foot into a church meeting room before came to the congregation centre for this information meeting.

In Germany, there are many Gratis Shops. They are part of a network. Once a year, engaged people from all shops come together. Two helpers from the Detmold team participated, too. There, they encountered people from different surroundings. Apart from practical experiences, basic ideas on economy and politics were exchanged. These considerations reach us in Detmold, too, through the reports the participants give during our shop meetings. We are strengthened in our deeds and convictions. Because we know: what we are trying to do here is tried by other people in other places, too.

The meeting point Gratis Shop enables volunteers to engage themselves practically, to encounter people from different cultural and social surroundings and levels. This work widens their own angle of vision. It creates much pleasure and fulfilment. Again and again, somebody drops in, saying: "I want to cooperate." Heartily welcome!

Claudia Ostarek

# ECUMENICAL CENTRE OLDENBURG



Christians of different confessions founded the society "*Öku Oldenburg e.V. (Ecumenical Centre Oldenburg)*" after they had co-operated for many years within the conciliar process 1997. The members of the society pledged themselves to stand up for the realisation of more justice in the One World, for maintaining peace, for the integrity of creation.

Therefore, the Ecumenical Centre is understood as

- an **information centre** for people, for church and other initiatives in our region, who are searching for answers to the searing questions of justice, peace among nations and environment protection, endeavouring to realise the answers locally and globally;
- a **Meeting Place** for people who intend to safeguard the future of the world and our community, a place where activities of the conciliar process in the region Oldenburg can be initiated and/or co-ordinated;
- a **World Store**, in which people can buy *fairly* traded goods, thereby contributing to more justice in world trade.

All people, groups and communities who want to support or influence the operation of the **Ecumenical Centre Oldenburg** are welcome as members.

## Details of Operation and Offers

- Collecting and making available information and working materials concerning the topics justice (development politics/development aid), peace (violence free resistance/peace corps services) and integrity of creation (environment protection);
- Communication and consulting services for people, groups and communities who visit the Ecumenical Centre;
- Organising and holding lectures and seminars (ecumenical education and learning);
- Promoting and supporting ecumenical partnership relations;
- Networking between different initiatives in Oldenburg county who pledged themselves to support the conciliar process. Establishing contacts to initiatives and organisations whose objectives are partnership encounters and exchange of persons within the One World, for instance „decade for overcoming violence“.
- Sale of *fairly* traded goods from Africa, Asia and Latin America, Fair Trade education work.



### **Organisation of the Society**

The financial means needed to cover the factual costs of the centre are obtained from membership contributions, donations and collections in the churches and church societies in the region of Oldenburg.

**The Ecumenical Centre urgently needs more voluntary helpers, donations and collections.**

Gerd Pöppelmeier

## „C-Plus“

Today, I accepted the invitation. At 6.30 p.m., a church service of special nature starts in Uelsen: „C-Plus“. It is already the second session. At 4 p.m., the first session took place, at that time with a parallel children's service. The subject is "Why does it have to be me?" People with buttons „C-Plus“ stream around, they guide me politely into the church meeting rooms. Through the crowded antechamber, passing book displays and signboards. I sit down on a chair in the assembly room. A man in the adjacent chair greets me in a low voice. Starting time. The light is dimmed softly, a band begins to play, I relax. An announcement is made, a short preamble, again and again interrupted by the band with songs, songs that I know from the North German radio station and others that I do not know. The words of the songs are displayed by Power Point onto the wall. Then, the pastor, clad in jeans, talks about the subject, without standing in the pulpit. It is like a talk-show, there are only very few citations from the bible. Music again. While the light becomes bright, all participants are asked to fill in three pieces of cardboard paper, blue: questions to the pastor, orange: prayer requests, white: feed back. I do not succeed in filling in more than one paper. Music again, while some people in front busily assort the papers. Then a "cross-examination", pastor and interviewer sitting on bar chairs. Five questions, one minute for each, indicated decently by the drums. The audience is attentive, the talk is concentrated. Songs again, then a prayer section, started by a wonderful text regarding faith, distinguishing between faith that frees you and faith that suppresses you. Intercession prayer, some of the prayer requests are read out. The Lord's Prayer is recited jointly, this is the only time during the evening when my voice is activated. Final hymn, exit with a collection to cover the cost of the C-Plus church-Service. Those who want to stay on are invited to enjoy potatoes in foils and drinks. The book display is crowded. Gradually, the crowd leaves the meeting rooms. Some persons stay behind to restore order.

A church service movement that radiated to Germany from the USA, originating in Willow Creek. On one hand, it was related to earlier experiments with alternative forms of church service existing since the sixties (Youth Service, Commentary Service, Communication Service, ...). On the other hand, the new movement supplied numerous new materials (see below) to create impulses for a co-ordinated formation of a new „Willow Creek scene“ in Germany, partly in the Free Church, partly in regional churches. As far as I know, the movement did not result in the foundation of completely new congregations in Germany as it happened in Willow Creek.

The Evangelical Reformed congregation in Uelsen (about 6000 members) obtained information and guidance from a congregation in Niederh6chstadt/Frankfurt which had been influenced by Willow Creek. Thereafter, they started in the beginning of 2002 a „second program“ of their church services. In Bentheim county in the Evangelical Old Reformed congregations, the old tradition of theme services (Heidelberg catechism!) is partly maintained on Sunday afternoons.

It is apparent that the congregation of Uelsen reacts in a missionary way to a challenge: more and more of the church members between 25 and 50 years of age do not attend the church service on Sunday mornings any longer. Therefore, it was decided to offer special services to increasingly meet the requirements of this generation, provided that these

requirements are known – the accuracy increases with the experience, every time a feedback paper is circulated.

In the meantime, Uelsen celebrates „C-Plus“ services six times a year. The topics are increasingly adapted to the requirements of the participants. For instance: unemployed – what is the value of a person; women are different, men too. While the pre-arranged Willow Creek material was very helpful in the beginning, its use decreases in course of time. About 250 people attend the afternoon service, about 150-200 the evening service. Most of them live in Uelsen or in the surrounding communities. Practically all of them did not or did no longer attend the services of their congregation on Sunday mornings. The preparations are handled by a steering team consisting of the congregation pastors, the youth adviser and many volunteers. Many people who are technically interested could be recruited as volunteers because there are many technical components involved (electronic equipment for music reproduction, personal computer, head sets of the participants). Many others are enlisted for thematic tasks (preparing the topics, sorting out the paper cards for prayer requests and questions); the total number of active volunteers is approximately 60.

From the point of view of mission theology, I believe that the objective is to inculcate the Gospel into a changing (sub-)culture of young people in Germany, people who for instance

- like to sleep a bit longer on Sundays and/or to have breakfast at leisure with their families,
- are no longer attracted by the traditional church music,
- are no longer accustomed to sing,
- have more questions than answers and opinions, as far as religion is concerned,
- do not wish to shoulder the obligations of a community in a direct manner (similarly in clubs or societies, unions and, as in this case, church congregations)

We must investigate whether the Gospel and popular culture are really compatible. I do not refer to the style of the music or to the event character of the performance. I ask myself: is it admissible that people maintain their individual behaviour, their protesting cultural attitudes while the Gospel is preached to them? Or is it, on the contrary, an element of the propagation of the Gospel to liberate people from social behaviour trends? Is it therefore essential to find ways leading to a closer companionship of a congregation? If so, how does the newly established community react towards the traditional regional congregation? Must we expect that the Sunday morning service becomes an objective directed practically only towards older people, seniors? Should we expect the formation of parallel structures, a schism?

Another question: is it admissible to leave the visitors of the service to themselves, to spare them the obligation of finding their own relation to the Faith? Only to prevent them from feeling pressurised? We remember that the traditional “tent mission events” used in many cases unbearable pressure to lead people to their own confession. It is intentional that elements of confession are absent from the C-Plus service. Even participation in singing hymns, which is indeed a form of confession, is avoided. But then

– how to shape the participants into a congregation? Does the congregation gain shape in the community of active volunteers? They do crave for a deepened Gospel basis, a craving that is, indeed, satisfied during service preparation. Does the new form of service comprise an Evangelical objective, even in long-term considerations?

Information and contacts:

- regarding “C-Plus”: Pastor Manfred Meyer, Uelsen, Tel: 05942-2493 or 05921-880219, mail: [manfred.g.meyer@web.de](mailto:manfred.g.meyer@web.de)
- regarding the Willow-Creek movement: Willow Creek Germany, Tel: 0641-98437-0, Internet: [www.willowcreek.de](http://www.willowcreek.de)

Günter Baum

## **An Example of Missionary Presence**

### **Kapitel 8 (Chapter 8) – the Evangelical Information Centre in Bremen**

For a long time, the Evangelical churches in Germany have been confronted with a type of church members that usually does not receive much attention in the congregations: the majority of church members (approx. 70 to 80 per cent) does not belong to the “inner circle” of the congregation. They get in touch with their church only on special occasions (baptism, confirmation, wedding, burial) or on seasonal dates (Christmas, New Year, Easter, Thanksgiving). Only sporadically, they make use of very special offers of their church (church music, discussions, retreats and similar events). Thus, they are satisfied. Without doubt, the so-called core congregation is essential for handing down and developing the Gospel. But there is a danger that they become self-satisfied and lose sight of the so-called “church loyalists at a distance” or “Christians in half distance”.

Six years ago, the Evangelical Church of Bremen recognised the necessity of developing a new approach to city work. It is true that the large medieval churches dominate the contours of the city. But within the city, we are not really near to the human beings. They dart quickly past the churches, they are in a hurry. Only tourists find their way into a church. There is growing alienation: on one side, there are service and church community offers directed towards the core congregation; on the other side, there are the “church loyalists at a distance” who sometimes are too shy to establish contact with a congregation. They keep a certain distance; they assume that the congregation does not accept their way of living their faith. To remedy this situation, the Evangelical Church of Bremen established an Evangelical Information Centre – Kapitel 8 – in the centre of the city. The pastor working there with her 16 volunteers has, within 6 years, rendered Kapitel 8 an established institution that has become an integral part of the church landscape in Bremen.

Kapitel 8 is understood as a show-case of the Evangelical Church of Bremen, a signpost to its congregations and establishments. Kapitel 8 is centrally located and, intentionally, freely accessible. It is thus possible to establish contact with the church without prior engagement; to obtain information on events in congregations and church institutions.

Furthermore, Kapitel 8 is a place where topical subjects can be taken up, to be handled in podium discussions or conversation rounds. If a controversial subject flares up in Bremen or in Germany, such as the Iraq war or the protection of the sanctity of Sundays, Kapitel 8 is capable of arranging within a few days a conversation forum incorporating experts, politicians and laymen/laywomen. Kapitel 8 furthermore connects church and culture by arranging expositions of sacral and secular art projects.

According to the experience of Kapitel 8, two thirds of the visitors came in order to inform themselves. Adults of all ages obtain information on various offers, they want answers to certain questions of church and theology. Frequently asked questions relate to the preparation and the process of weddings and baptisms. But at the same time, information is sought on congregation events, consulting services, self-help groups, church music, educational leave, a Gospel choir, Taizé-meditation, trips to Rome, visits to monasteries and other subjects.

One should not overlook the fact that, within the Evangelical Church of Bremen, Kapitel 8 is the central place for re-entering church. It is definitely used for that purpose. During past years, about 500 people declared in Kapitel 8 their re-entry into the Evangelical Church of Bremen. Annually, about 8000 people visit Kapitel 8. It is open from Monday to Friday between 11.30 and 19.00 hours, on Saturdays from 11.00 till 14.00 hours.

Kapitel 8 contributes towards overcoming the growing alienation between the “core congregation” and the “church loyals at a distance”. Kapitel 8 talks to church members who keep a distance to the church and gains experience therefrom; important conclusions from those talks are passed on to the congregation. It is remarkable that especially people of average age ask for unsophisticated bible lectures and church services that correspond to their own emotions and sentiments.

Pastor Louis-Ferdinand v. Zobeltitz  
Secretary, Evangelical Church of Bremen

## **E. P. Church Pharmacy Project**

In the years 2000 and 2001, the Christian Health Association of Ghana recognized the tremendous contributions to quality health care delivery by the E.P Church's Health Unit with a Certificate of **GOOD STANDING**. This brings a ray of hope to membership because as a Church, we continue to take new strides in our health delivery. I am pleased to inform the Theological Consultation of the E.P Church's intention to establish a Pharmacy. The objectives behind this decision are:

- i) To increase financial and geographical access to a 24-hour dispensing services to the people of Ho and its surrounding villages;
- ii) To facilitate drug supply among the Church's Health institutions and beyond;
- iii) To increase and sustain the income level of the Health Unit and the entire Church;
- iv) To enhance Health delivery supervision within the Church's Health Institutions.

The estimated total cost of the Project is ₵365.5m. When completed, the Pharmacy, which will be sited at the foreground of the Headquarters, will have a Store Room, Warehouse/Wholesale Unit, an Office, a full-time or part-time Pharmacist, Two Store Attendants/ Dispensing Assistants and a Night Watchman. Efforts are underway to source funding for the project.

Rev. Frank ANKU  
Synod Clerk of the EP Church, Ghana

## **CEPROFORE - ATAKPAME: A TOOL OF THE CHURCH FOR ITS PROPHETIC MISSION**

Massive poverty is rampant in many African villages and city slums, especially among children, women, illiterate and unemployed youths. Though all over the world, most people lack the sufficient material resources required for a decent life and live in a state of weakness, dependency and humiliation, the phenomenon of poverty seems more blatant and offensively incongruous among African people. Either in Togo or Ghana whose two main Protestant Churches are members of the Bremen Mission, poverty strikes severely as well, and thousands of people are constantly at risk of hunger and social reject, with children and persons with HIV/AIDS being especially vulnerable.

In Togo, political instability, economic sanctions, limited access to education and health services have contributed to a situation of poverty that only worsens year after year. It has become difficult to talk about Togo without referring to its undemocratic rule, the malnutrition of the population, its inadequate housing and clothing, inadequate medical care, disease, high infant mortality, illiteracy, inadequate system of education, and the unemployment of the youths. Figures published in 2002 show that 45% of young graduates are unemployed. The percentage of young girls under 18 in full time education is less than 35%, and their insertion becomes a serious problem for the whole country. Besides, religious sects with their devious and ungrounded teachings are putting women and youths in an increasing pauperization.

Confronted with such a situation, churches have reacted and are continuing to do so. For decades the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo has been very active in charitable and development programs, working with and for the poor (women, sick, destitute, refugees...).

Some concrete examples are the work being done by COPFEDES and CEPRODED under the Fight against Poverty Program, BETHESDA or KATIVU Hospitals under the Health Service Program, our church-run primary and secondary schools under the Educational Program.

The missionary project I am about to present here is the one concerning the work that is being done at **CEPROFORE - ATAKPAME**, the Protestant Center for Training and Meeting (simply the Seminary), under the **Department of Christian Education**.

### **WHY CEPROFORE - ATAKPAME?**

**CEPROFORE** is the place where leaders in the church are trained. Training of church workers and leaders has always been a main concern for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo (EEPT). Let's take note for the record that the successive Moderators in EEPT have all been students of the institution known today as CEPROFORE. The present Moderator is not excluded.

When people are well trained and well equipped with the necessary knowledge, they help others better in changing their lives. In Togo, like in many countries in Africa, people are poor or are dying from lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). **Education and training are thus the foundation of our missionary endeavors, the keys of any**



**sustainable development.** In fact, though the Church has been active in charitable and development programs for decades, its efforts still remain insufficient and the achieved results appeared small with regard to the overall situation of poverty. Generally speaking, though the church's efforts towards the poor appear laudable, it has failed so far to get at the roots of the problem of poverty in the country. The church has failed to go beyond its charity missions and propose adequate solutions to tackle the problem of poverty in Togo. Poverty alleviation or its eradication is first of all a question of change: change of mentality and change of behaviors. People are being pauperized because of ignorance. To get them out of this pauperization they need to be educated and trained for a positive change. Because they are symbols which act to establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in human beings, religious teachings have human consequences. They help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken them, advance or diminish the quality of their life. That is why I think of Christian **Education** as the foundation of our missionary endeavors, and think of our training institutions as tools for the Prophetic mission of the Church.

## **CEPROFORE THEN AND NOW**

### **1. Goals and Objectives**

From its foundation in 1864, the Seminary, known today as CEPROFORE, was intended for the following goals and objectives:

1864: To train workers for the young Church; a general training as well as biblical and theological training;

1921: To train workers of the church and especially to promote the national languages. (At the time, it was the Ewe language). While the State was imposing French, the Church, without abandoning French, was stressing on the study of Ewe.

1928: To encourage a "culture of convent." Gobe, where the seminary was located, is on the mountain at about two hours walk from the nearest road. Students were in that way housed and trained far from "the world."

1938: To promote evangelism among the Akposso

1993: A Program for **Continuing Education** was initiated to strengthen church workers' initial training.

1996 - 1998: The birth of CEPROFORE. In addition to its training programs (Professional Studies and Continuing Education), the Seminary becomes a place for ecumenical meeting.

## 2. Infrastructures

Thanks to the financial support of EMW and Bremen Mission, the infrastructures at CEPROFORE are partly renovated to help the center achieve its new goals.

- The Director's house and the administrative building have been entirely renovated with two garages;
- Lodging for a pastor has been constructed;
- the Personnel houses have also been renovated;
- the roofing of the old refectory has been renovated;
- Toilets have been constructed;
- four dormitories have been constructed;
- a new refectory is constructed;
- an agro - pastoral unit is set up;

## 3. Study Programs

Various training programs, workshops, and meetings are taking place at CEPROFORE.

- Training Programs for Catechists, Pastors and Elders;
- Workshops for the Clergy, Women, Youths, Sunday School Teachers, Human Rights activists;
- Meetings: Synod Committee, Retreat of Pastors, different church groups' annual camps, ecumenical meetings.

## 4. Perspectives

Presently CEPROFORE pursues its vocation as a center for professional studies and continuing education. Thirteen catechists to become pastors, of which two women, have just graduated.

In the coming academic years catechists volunteers and assistant catechists will be formally trained. This will be done progressively by selection. Other projects are on the way to improve the quality of the training and adapt the content of the courses to our context. In addition to the traditional biblical and theological courses, new courses might deal with **Human Rights, Justice and Peace issues, HIV/AIDS, Violence against women, Child exploitation and Child slavery, Management of Development Projects, Leadership Development, Fight against Poverty...**

With the present financial difficulties in the country as well as in the church, CEPROFORE must turn toward a self-sufficiency. This is also one of the reasons why the center has been renovated as a place for training and meeting. The infrastructure needs to be extended though, since:

- CEPROFORE -Atakpame is about to become one of **the campus of the Protestant University of West Africa (UPAO)** together with Porto-Novo (Benin) and Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire),
- CEPROFORE will remain a Center for Continuing Education for the founding churches;
- CEPROFORE wants to open up its revenue generating service to seminars and conferences organized by profane organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The Protestant Center for Training and Meeting (CEPROFORE) is fulfilling its vocation as training and meeting place for God's people. It is a tool of the church for its prophetic mission. The building of **a new library** and **a space for seminars and meetings** would considerably increase its capacities for service.

Emmanuel Adiavu AYEDZE





## Devotion: St. Luke 7, 18 – 23

It seems obvious that the Text of this devotion has been adequately selected for a consultation like this.

Take for example verse 22: "**Then Jesus answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.**" This is a continuation of St. Luke 4, 18 and 19; those verses were cited from Isaiah 61, 1 - 3: Jesus adopts the role of a servant to execute his mission, as described in these bible passages.

But the text or at least the consequences of the text pose a problem for me: a feeling of helplessness.

What does that mean?

The topic is the question of John the Baptist to Jesus: "Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?" (Verse 20)

This question is all the more relevant because numerous important actions and words of Jesus are described in the preceding chapters. It is true that his work and his task have only begun, but he had already to preach (4, 31 continued), to heal (4, 38 continued; 5, 12 continued; 5, 17 continued; 6, 6 continued). Even chapter 7 illustrates the matter: 7, 1 - 10 the healing of a centurion's servant; 7, 11(continued) resurrection of a young man from Nain. Furthermore, at the end of the last narration, this is emphasised: "And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about." (7, 17).

The Ecumenical Translation of the Bible (ÖÜB) defines the word „region“ in this verse, in German here translated as „Land“: It says that in the language of St. Luke, Judea means the whole land of the Jews including Galilee to which Nain belongs. Therefore, the search for the justification of the question of John the Baptist is impeded by excluding the fact that one of them (Jesus) and the other (John the Baptist) were active in different places.

Why is the latter still in doubt as to the true identity of Jesus?

- Is it possible that John the Baptist is subject to a mix-up, did he not properly understand the mission task entrusted to Jesus? Is it a misunderstanding? This can be assumed. It is true that the expression "He that cometh" in the gospels is used to describe the Messiah (St. Mark 1, 7; 11, 9; St. Matthew 23, 39 ...).

The expression "The Christ" in the tongue of a Jew has a national, a political, a judicial, and a purging meaning for which all Israel is waiting (St. Luke 3, 16 – 17).

If, however, John the Baptist has misinterpreted the role of Jesus, why does the latter start to „cure many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits; and into many that were blind he gave sight“ (verse 21). Why does he give witness, again and again, as if the verse 7,17 (his reputation everywhere) did not exist?

These are questions which I cannot answer. They enable us to understand that in some cases situations which seem to be clear, looking at them closely, are less clear.

Within the frame of our consultation we can ask ourselves, beginning with questions relating to the proposed text: what is our presence within the society in which we live? The actions and deeds performed by us here and there, are they recognised, are they sufficiently clear, looking at them from our side (from within the church), and looking at them from the surrounding world (from outside the church)?

- I am of the opinion that the proposed Bible text demands from us,
  - either to act in a more **object-related/purposeful** manner, keeping in mind the visibility and clarity of church actions;
  - or to **co-ordinate/assimilate repeatedly** our actions. It is said that repetition is the best educational theory!

In all cases - be it the object-related/purposeful or the co-ordinating/assimilating approach – the people are expecting something, are **waiting** for something (see the end of verse 19 and the end of verse 20). It is another question what this something is, but indeed the people are waiting.

Furthermore we find that Jesus “explains” himself by **acting**:

**a) étherapeusen (He heals)**

Beneficiaries of this healing action of Jesus are many people with **Nosos**. Nosos can be understood as:

1. nausea = like seasickness, the craving to vomit or, in an abstract sense, to have a deep disgust (towards life?)
2. Nosée, reaching from Epilepsy to spiritual suffering (to mental disorder?), comprising sterility, demented brain, insanity, madness.

The therapy of Jesus extends to people **in distress** (scourge, mischief, grief, irresistible violence threatening the existence) and to those that are of bad/evil spirit.

- b) Furthermore, the actions of Jesus can be understood as **granting/distributing blessings**.  
The beneficiaries of this type of actions are blind people.**

A long list (verse 22) of the actions of Jesus follows: recovery of eyesight (blind people), walking ability (lame people), cleanliness (lepers), hearing capability (deaf people), resurrection (dead people), preaching of the gospel (poor people).

Apart from these considerations, I wish to mention another conflict that is incorporated in this Bible text. When Jesus dismisses the emissaries of John the Baptist, He says to them: „Go and tell John what you saw and heard“.

- Is faith a method of **already** owning things hoped for? Yes! (Heb. 11, 1)
- Is it a method of recognising/knowing realities that are **not visible**? Yes! (Heb. 11, 1)
- Do we walk the way with Jesus by faith, not by sight? Yes! (2. Kor. 5, 7)

How, then, is the message of Jesus to the emissaries to be understood „Go and tell what you have **seen** and **heard**”? How can the blessing “blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believe” (St. John 20, 29 continued) be brought in line with „Go and tell John what you have seen and heard” (St. Luke 2, 22)?

Finally, I wish to draw attention to the way in which Jesus is introduced on our bible text. He is called “he who comes”. Grammatically, this is a form which in French represents the continuing presence (meaning “he who comes; he who continues to come”). He who was is he who is and he who will be.

Could this presence, comprising known and unknown matters, unexpected and unbelievable facts, guide us to bear witness in the church of Jesus? The world (the region) in which we live, containing multiple challenges (Nosee/nausea/lameness/deafness/death), this world or, to be exact, these worlds **are waiting for** our many-sided therapy, the granting of grace, the recovery of eyesight, the purge, the resurrection, the preaching of the gospel.

**AMEN!**

Rev. Dr. Gerson Kodjo BESSA  
Moderator of the EEPT



## MORNING DEVOTION AND BIBLE STUDY

### Opening Sentences:

Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because God has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4: 18, 19) As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (John 20: 21)

Lutheran Hymn 511 (Refer to sheet)

Prayer by: Rev. Frank Anku

Text: I<sup>st</sup> Peter 3: 8 - 17

### Exposition:

Mission has been defined as being sent on a task. God is a sending God. He sent Abraham, Moses, Joseph and the prophets to fulfil a particular function and calling. God sent his Son; the Father and the Son sent the Spirit; and the Son and the Spirit sent out people -us.

Although Christ's main mission was to atone for sin on the cross, Jesus was also sent to preach the Good News to the multitudes and to heal their diseases: This twofold pattern of mission applies to members of the Church whom God sends out today. The Church must preach the Gospel and do good works of love and kindness in the world. Our comprehensive task is to be salt and light in the world, enriching lives and lighting the way for those who walk in darkness. (Matt. 5: 13- 16)

These basic principles of mission apply to all Christians and particularly, to us churches that form the membership of the Bremen Mission. We have been called and sent to operate in the various localities in which we find ourselves; E. P. Church in Ghana, E.E:P.T. in Togo and the German Churches in Germany. We can further break this down to say that as individual Christians, we are called to serve as Christ's witnesses in terms of being salt and light in our homes, families, at our workplaces and our communities.

As individual Churches, Peter's message in the passage read comes as an exhortation to give us hope and to encourage us to persevere in our commitment to Christ in the midst of suffering and difficulties we encounter as we respond to God's call to mission. He demonstrates what it means to live as Christians in a hostile world. He also gives practical advice for Christian living. Peter teaches that in all our words and actions, we should be concerned about our witness to the world in order to bring people to Christ.

In the same vein, Peter's exhortation comes to us as churches that have come together under the Bremen Mission Partnership. Despite the fact that we are of different cultures and operate in different contexts, the thrust of our mission, wherever we are is the same. As Klaus Sheiffer said, our mission wherever we are has a solidarity dimension, a formation of identity dimension and a reconciliation dimension. Our being together äs

partners within the Bremen Mission to strengthen and to support each other is, therefore, not out of place because we all find ourselves in a world that presents many challenges to us as we seek to discern God's will for God's creation and act upon it.

The challenges that the Church faced at the time of Peter which made their world hostile to them included trials that became a test of their faith; physical assault by people who did not understand them and saw them as rebels; slander, rejection and insults, just to mention a few.

In our present day, things that make our world, in which we respond to God's call, hostile include apathy on the part of those we expect to do mission with, misconceptions about our missionary activities, lack of sufficient funding to do what we believe is a discernment of God's will for God's people within a particular period and the strife of churches in general to outwit one another instead of complementing one another as we play our roles in God's mission. The persecution faced by our Togolese brothers and sisters in their country also makes their context hostile.

Under such circumstances, Peter offers the Church certain attitudes that should be adopted by individual Christians and Churches in order to overcome the challenges and problems that confront us as we endeavour to obey God's call to mission.

The first strategy is for us to live in harmony with one another; and I believe that is one of the reasons why we are holding discussions here today.

For us members of the Bremen Mission, the first key to living in harmony with one another is realizing the fact that we have one mission, which is actually God's mission which is being expressed in different contexts within specific periods.

Peter exhorts us to live together in harmony by being sympathetic to one another, by loving one another, by being compassionate towards each other, by being humble, not thinking that we are better or more important than others, by forgiving each others' mistakes and by respecting one another because we are one in Christ.

As members of the Bremen Mission Partnership, each of us needs to have a clear conscience. We should not do things because of ulterior motives that will benefit us alone in the end. Rather, we should take actions that will promote the vision of our partnership and, in fact, push Christ's mission forward. We should not be selfish in our thinking and actions. Rather, we should look out for what complements our work and mission as partners. (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3: 11) This will help maintain peace among us.

As we work together, we would definitely encounter some difficulties that may make us feel like "calling it quits." Peter says that we need to realize that Christ who has sent us went the same way. Suffering and difficulties can come from any angle; even from our co-partners; but this should not stop us from playing our roles in this mission partnership. We need to realize that despite the difficulties we experience, that which propels us to do what we do is faith and hope. Hope resulting from our belief that Christ who calls us, who went down the same route of suffering is always with us; and with him, we will reach

the expected end; Hope resulting from our conviction that we are not alone but we have partners who will stand by us and encourage us on to the expected end.

As Jürgen Moltmann says, it is faith that brings us to the path of the true life but hope keeps us there. Let us just make sure that we are doing the right things and that we are confident about what we are doing. Let us use the right processes, the right procedures, the right resource people, etc, so that we can confidently defend our actions. This would also keep us in good Standing with God. Consequently, we would be in the position to receive all the blessings that God promises us. We need to understand that as we work together in partnership, we are not working for each other. Whatever we do and offer, let us do it as unto the Lord; presenting ourselves as living sacrifices in thanksgiving for the grace and love of God upon our lives and engaging in mission as a joyful celebration of the life in fullness that God brings to us through Christ. (Col. 3: 17) This should be the impetus for all we do as partners in mission.

As a way of reflecting on this passage, we need to think about ways in which we can give hope to one another in the light of various difficulties we encounter in our mission work today.

May Christ who sends us lighten our path so that we would know what Steps to take as we work together in partnership in God's mission.

Rev. Bridget BEN-NAIMAH  
E. P. Church, Ghana

## Bible Study to Deuteronomy 6, 20 - 25

- (20) And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgements, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?"
- (21) Then thou shalt say unto thy son, "We were Pharaoh's bond-men in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand :
- (22) And the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes :
- (23) And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers.
- (24) And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.
- (25) And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us."

The Deuteronomy is considered the centre piece of the Old Testament. Most important: it contains the command to love God (Deuteronomy 6,4: Hear, O Israel; the Lord, our God, is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.) which is considered the most important commandment by Jesus. The afore-mentioned verses follow soon afterwards. Furthermore, the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy 5,6 ff. (compare Exodus 20, 1 ff.). It is clear from which situation our biblical text originates: a child asks its father for the meaning of the biblical commands and rules: „What is the meaning of the commands, rules and rights that the Lord, our God, has set? ..“ (Deuteronomy 6.21)

The answer is provided not by a definition, but by narrating the salvation history of Israel, God's people: „We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord used His powerful hand to lead us out of Egypt“ (Deuteronomy 6.21)

In this way, the Father reminds the inquiring child of the birth hour of the people of Israel: Israel was „born“ when God liberated His people from servitude, from slavery in Egypt. This commitment to the God of Israel who is a God of liberation is deepened further by remembering the signs and wonders that broke the power of the Pharaoh, directing all people of Israel towards the promised target: the acceptance of the praised land that God had already promised to the fathers of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jakob) (*Verses 22 -23*).

Thus, God's liberation of his people forms the basis for all His commandments and rules. It is as if the God of Israel „defined“ Himself as a god of freedom who liberates from suppression and slavery in order to donate **life** (see Deuteronomy 5,6 "I am the Lord **thy** God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" – as the caption of the Ten Commandments).

All the following commandments and rules are God's laws that serve to assist His people in cultivating and preserving the freedom received as a gift, within the land given to them by God: „And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.“ (Deuteronomy 6.24)

Thus, this law is at the same time a promise: the fear of God, the adoration of the One God, concretely fulfilled in observing the commandments, leads to a fulfilled life, day after day, "... that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee."

To achieve a theological appropriate understanding, it is essential to observe the sequence of the history of salvation: The first is God's fundamental liberating action towards His people. **His love** comes **first**. It essentially revitalises the people of Israel. The God of Israel donates freedom: liberation from slavery in Egypt. Thus, the exodus is the basic date of Israel. The second are the commandments, admonitions and rules - they must be considered a graceful gift, too. Strictly speaking, they are not really "second" in a sense of having been added subsequently. No, they really correspond to the "first": to observe the commandments enables Israel to survive in the donated land, it **preserves** the life of all people, therefore it serves the community of God's people, too. Justice of God's people is to be understood in the same manner: this justice is not one's own self-made justice but a justice given by God, indeed, a justice made possible only by Him.

This justice means that the people take care to observe God's commandments in their daily life, concretely, actively. „And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.“ (*Verse 25*)

The theological basic structure of this chapter reminds us strongly of the kind of theology of St. Paul.

The first is the promised salvation, given by God. (Indicator of salvation: see for instance Galater 5.1a "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free!")

The second is the admonition to correspond to God's salvation action in one's daily life (Imperative: see for instance *Galater 5,1 b*: „Stand fast and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.“)

When we **ask ourselves how to achieve a common mission** under consideration of the specific circumstances of life in Ghana, Togo, and Germany respectively, some basic thoughts are derived essentially from the aforesaid:

To start with, the chapter as a whole indicates that mission is on principle not possible without tradition.

The beginning of our pericope: "When thy son asketh thee in time to come ..." indicates the challenge and the task: the valuable "articles of faith" that were entrusted to us must be handed down. At the same time, a problem is indicated. Faith is not a matter that can be handed down like an object.

Therefore, faith can only be "awakened" in a place where people themselves talk of the deeds that God did for them. Faith and narration belong together. This applies to the Christian and to the Jewish faith: people narrate of God and of their own experiences with God. The light of the words of the Bible makes them understand their own experiences of faith, made during their own life history. They use the words of the Bible as a mirror, seeing the God of the Bible as the God of life:

God is the being that is always available to us (See for instance *Exodus 3, 14* and *J. Matthew 28,20*: „And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.“)

Our faith is based upon the Truth of God that is committed to us daily by the words of the Bible. We witness our faith and our trust, this witness will be impressed on our children, too. One has to remember that our faith is not a static matter but a living result of our life history that enables us to discover again and again God's traces.

Returning to the central thesis: mission is not possible without tradition.

Each of us knows people who were of fundamental importance to the development of our own faith. We, too, know **fathers and mothers** of our **faith** who influenced the way that our life and our faith went. It is important to remember this again and again. Because we would not be what we are but for their witness of faith. How many people should we be grateful to, considering the development of our faith! In this way, God gave us rich presents.

At the same time, these facts remind us again of our task when looking onto the wide field of mission: We were inspired by the faith witness of our fathers and mothers of faith, we continue to be inspired by their living memory. In the same manner, we are challenged and called upon to be witnesses of faith for our children, for the next generation. . . We must and should continue to narrate of the great deeds of God in our life, in the life of our fathers and mothers, down to the very beginning of God's people. Christ provided for us a share in the salvation history of His people. We are and we continue to be beneficiaries of faith, presented to us. If our children can concretely experience the genuineness of our faith in our daily life, they will become more impressed by our mission:  
Reading a biblical story to them, jointly singing and praying in our homes, participating with them in church services, narrating our own experiences with God, showing them how we treat our fellow human beings (our neighbours) .  
Children like to listen to stories. They love to listen when we narrate. In our home, we developed a family tradition of our own: a story is read to the children before they go to bed. Thereafter, we sing a hymn and we pray. In this manner, the day is put back into God's hands. Children can experience that God loves them, that they are safe with Him. If this confidence is allowed to grow within the heart of a child, it opens a chance to this child to discover possibilities of its own, chances to find its own way of faith and of life.

#### Impulses for our Bible Study:

Where and in which relations to life do I talk of God?

Where and in which connection is it necessary to talk of God in a new manner, talking of Him being a God of liberation? (Society, politics, culture)

How can we express our faith in this God of liberation, within the partnership of the churches of Bremen Mission? Finding an expression that enlists other people's sympathies, that invites them, that evangelises them in a missionary way?

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