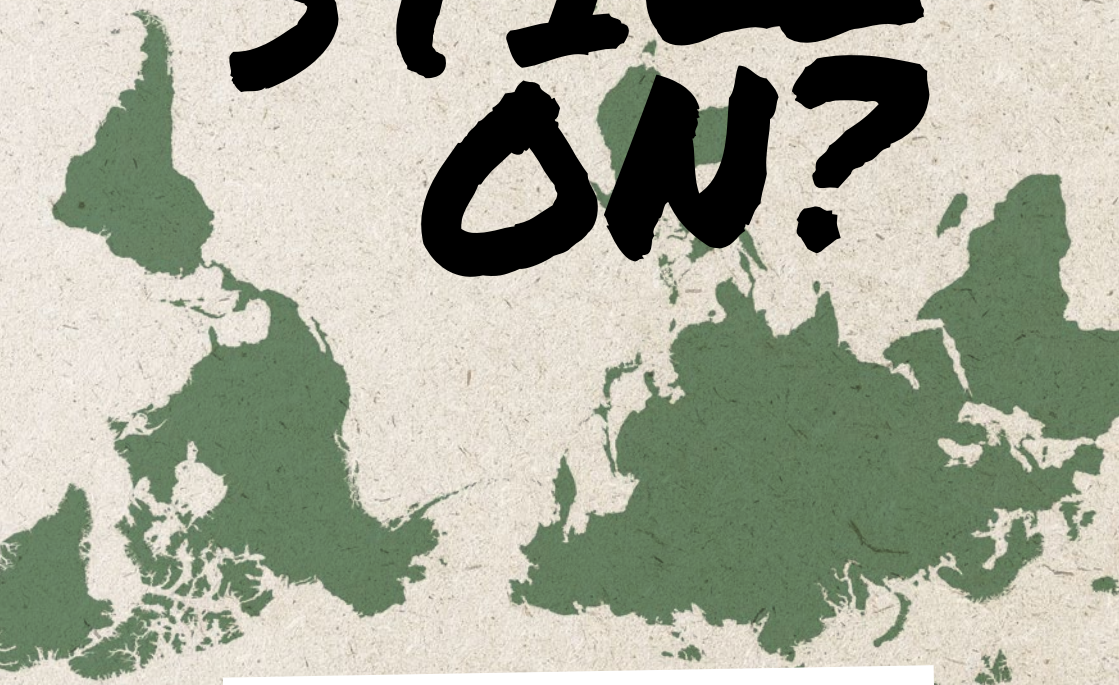
CLAUDIA WÄHRISCH-OBLAU (Ed.)

MISSION STILL ON?



WHY WE NEED POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

This book is dedicated to the 25 Evangelism Contact Persons
of the United Evangelical Mission
who work in ten countries on three continents
and who constantly challenge me theologically.

Claudia Währisch-Oblau (Editor)

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Why we need post-colonial perspectives

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Preface for the English edition

In Germany, even within churches, many people have taken to fundamentally question mission. Mission is supposed to be colonial, hegemonial and intrusive – no longer fitting into a time that promotes equality, dialogue and tolerance.

But within the United Evangelical Mission, we clearly say that mission goes on.

That is not enough, though. We need to ask what 'mission' means. Who does mission? And why? How is it practiced?

And, most importantly: What does post-colonial mission look like? A mission that is moved first of all by God's Holy Spirit. That follows Jesus in critiquing the powers that are. That is carried by people from all continents with their very different ways of believing. And that honestly speaks about what fills our hearts.

„It takes a village…" A book about postcolonial mission cannot be written by just one person, because postcolonial mission is diverse and complex and can only be adequately presented from a wide range of perspectives.

When the Neukirchener publishing house approached me about this publication for a German readership, it was therefore clear from the outset: I am not writing this alone! I developed the concept in discussions with many international colleagues and friends. And in the end, in addition to me putting together the entire text, seventeen other authors from eight countries on three continents contributed parts of the text.

But this book is not just a collection of essays. Rather, it is an attempt to create something common from different experiences of mission and different ways of thinking about it – just as in a patchwork quilt, each piece of fabric has its

own pattern, but in the end all these patterns come together to form a larger overall picture of what post-colonial mission is.

But first, a note of caution: the bigger picture that emerges in this book is not without contradictions. Postcolonial mission means that understandings of mission, worldviews and concrete practices differ significantly depending on the place and situation. This does not mean that one is more correct than the other. Thinking about mission in postcolonial terms means practicing tolerance of ambiguity: the ability to recognize ambiguity and insecurity and to tolerate them; not to immediately judge what is foreign and new, but to leave it be for the time being and accept it as a challenge for one's own thinking. This is what I invite you to do in this book!

I have known almost all of the authors who have contributed to this book for a long time, and I have been engaged in theological reflection with many of them for years. They come from member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) or are in contact with the UEM. So our breadth and diversity is also only a part of a much bigger whole!

We are all practitioners working in churches or church-related organizations, but at the same time reflecting theologically on what we do. That is why this book does not focus on academic mission theology, but on the questions of people at the grassroots all over the world. And we have written it for people at the grassroots who want to reflect on and rethink mission.

We hope that this book will inspire you to rethink mission yourself and to enter into conversation with others about it!

Claudia Währisch-Oblau, October 2024

Chapter 1

Mission theology: From imperial "conquering the world for Christ" to "discovering Christ together with others"

What actually is "mission"? When I tell people in Germany that I work for the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), the first question they often ask is how many "missionaries" we have. This refers to white German people who preach the Gospel in the global South, set up health and development projects and support 'local' churches in their work. Yes, there are still missionary organizations in Germany that work in this way. But the time of mission as a movement from North to South alone is long gone.

Postcolonial mission – that is what this book is about. It aims to give you an impression of what mission looks like in the 21st century and how people think about this mission theologically. But of course this does not happen in a vacuum. That is why we take a look at history in the first two chapters: Chapter 1 describes developments in mission theology and mission practice, and Chapter 2 reflects on the involvement

of mission in the colonial project of the global North and what follows for us today.

The term “mission” as a project of European Christians only emerged in the 16th century. The word was first used in this sense by Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order. Jesuit monks committed themselves to poverty, chastity, obedience and mission: and *mission* actually meant the Counter Reformation, bringing people in Europe back to the correct Catholic doctrine and church. The term therefore had a connotation of ecclesiastical self-preservation, expansion of power and dogmatic indoctrination from the very beginning – and it was created at a time when the Church was in an existential crisis.

However, those who begin the history of mission with Ignatius of Loyola overlook the fact that the Gospel had been spread throughout the world since Pentecost – except that no one used the term “mission” before Ignatius! And here, too, it is important to look beyond Europe. For in Europe, Christianization was often a violent process – just consider the bloody Christianization of the Saxons under Charlemagne, for example! In order to see that the spread of the Gospel and violence do not necessarily belong together, it is important to look at missionary history outside Europe.

Because the spread of the Gospel could look very different there! One example:

In the 7th century, monks of the East Syrian Church from what is now Iran brought the Gospel along the Silk Road as far as China. The monk Alopen reached the then Chinese capital of Chang’an (now Xi’an) around 635 and, with imperial permission, founded a Christian community there. The imperial stele documenting this can still be seen in Xi’an today.

The so-called Jesus Sutras, Gospel paraphrases in Chinese, were written in the Xi’an area shortly afterwards. They are

the manifestation of a thoroughly Chinese Christianity that expresses itself in Buddhist and Daoist terms. The Iranian monks were obviously engaged in intensive interreligious dialogue and learned a lot in the process! The ruins of the Louguantai monastery in central China were only identified as Christian in the 1990s – the imagery of the murals corresponded so closely to Daoist and Buddhist motifs.

Conversely, there are some ideas in Chinese folk Buddhism that may go back to a Christian influence: For example, the belief that invoking *Amitofu (Amitabha Buddha)* will allow believers to immediately enter the paradise of the Pure Land after their death.

So here we have a completely different model of "mission": not a clearly defined religion that separates itself from everything 'foreign', and which meets and replaces another faith in the process of colonial conquest! Rather, a grassroots movement of believers who reformulate their own faith in dialogue with people of other faiths, thereby not only winning people over to their own faith, but also influencing the faith of people of other religions. It is a pity that this missionary practice is so little known anywhere in the world!

But back to missionary work as it is commonly understood and criticized today. In the 15th and 16th centuries, developments in seafaring and navigation led to the "discovery" of new continents. The Portuguese and Spanish sailors were astonished to see that the inhabitants of these continents were not Christians. The Catholic Church could not accept this. The Iberian Peninsula had just been (re)Christianized with great violence against Muslims and Jews. This *reconquista* (re-conquest) now continued as *conquista* in Latin America: mission became world conquest by any means necessary. The primary aim was to found churches as an institution to

save the souls of the colonized. The fact that the conquerors brutally exploited the indigenous population was justified by the racist trope that the *Indians* had not yet reached the level of development of the *whites.* Only a few missionaries criticized this thinking and demanded better treatment for the colonized on the basis of the Gospel.

The second heyday of the mission began in the 19th century. Both Catholic and Protestant churches found themselves in a deep crisis at the time. Industrialization, secularization, technological progress, the founding of nation states and the emergence of democracies meant that the churches' cultural and political claims to authority were increasingly rejected. In response to this loss of importance, a new missionary movement emerged. Interestingly, however, it did not originate from pastors and church leaders, but from the congregation base. Many missionary organizations, including the Rhenish Mission, a forerunner of the UEM, were founded by 'mission-minded' merchants. These merchants saw colonialism not only as a business opportunity, but also as a way of reaching people who had not yet been Christianized with the gospel.

The high point of the colonial missionary movement was the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. The enthusiasm was great: the delegates believed that it was possible to evangelize the entire world within a generation if the churches only made enough effort and used the right methods. After all, it was unacceptable that millions of people would end up in hell simply because they had never been introduced to the Gospel!

But the missionary enthusiasm of Edinburgh was definitely problematic. It was deeply racist and steeped in the idea of *white* superiority. Mission was the *white man's* burden – women were not represented in Edinburgh, and of over

a thousand official delegates, only nineteen were from the Global South. Evangelization meant the spread of Christianity as it was understood in the Global North. Christianity meant 'civilization', the highest conceivable level of human development to which other peoples had to be brought. The dissolution of traditional 'pagan' cultures was welcomed; and non-Christian religions were simply seen as obstacles to be overcome. People thought and spoke in military metaphors: Mission was the conquest of the world for Christ and for Western civilization. And very pragmatically, consideration was given to how missionary societies and churches could work together to achieve this goal.

But then came the First World War … and the idea that Western civilization embodied Christianity was shattered, at least for many who thought theologically about missions. (It has, however, survived to this day in some evangelical missionary organizations in the global North).Still, thinking about mission remained a *white* endeavor; Christians from the Global South were not heard.

But how can mission be justified theologically if it is not thought of in terms of world conquest? This question drove mission theologians (I am not aware of any female theologians at that time) for the next few decades.

An answer only began to emerge in the 1950s. It later became known under the term *"Missio Dei"* (Mission of God) and was based on Karl Barth's ground-breaking thinking which rejected the basic approach of 19th century Western theology and was also very critical of the existing church.

Because it was a completely new theological approach, I need to expand a little to explain it:

Since the 16th century, mission had always been understood as a mandate to the church – so it effectively began

with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Its aim was to found new churches and enlarge existing ones so that people could be baptized and their souls could go to heaven after death. But if you think about it this way, mission is actually always about expanding your own organization, your own sphere of control. In other words, it is always a hegemonic project: for the church to grow, other religious formations must weaken or disappear completely.

In rejecting this hegemonic thinking, mission theologians in the 1950s anchored mission in God himself. They said: Mission is first and foremost what God himself does: God created the world, he sent Christ into the world for salvation, and the Holy Spirit is constantly present. God is a missionary God because God goes out of himself and engages with the world as a counterpart. God acts lovingly towards and with the world. God's intention is not for the whole world to belong to the Church at some point, but for the Kingdom of God to be established at the end of history. The church is therefore no longer the goal, but only a temporary instrument of mission, of God's action. When the Kingdom of God comes, the church will no longer be needed.

However, this also means taking a critical look at the church: is it actually a good and willing instrument of God's mission? Or does it rather stand in the way of God's mission? Participation in God's mission therefore means that the church must be prepared to be corrected and set right by God again and again.

Mission is God's mission – Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants of all stripes have agreed on this fundamental statement today. But as soon as it comes to concretizing this basic statement, harsh contradictions emerge.

This is because missionary theology must always consider fundamental theological questions:

How does God act in the world?

The church is the instrument of God's mission. But is it the only instrument through which God acts in the world? Does the Holy Spirit work only in and through the church, or also outside of it? Does God's mission also work through political liberation movements, for example?

In order to consider these questions, even more fundamental questions need to be answered:

How does the Kingdom of God actually come? And how do people get there?

Some say: God will bring the Kingdom all by himself at the end of time and will destroy the existing world in the process. It is a completely new creation. People can only enter this new world (which some simply think of as 'heaven'!) through faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone who has not actively accepted Christ as their savior remains excluded. Mission means making this fact known and inviting people to decide for Christ.

Others say: God is building God's Kingdom piece by piece in this world and within human history through the power of the Holy Spirit. God's Kingdom means shalom, peace and justice: war and weapons disappear, there is peace between people and between people and nature (and even in nature, predators only eat grass!). All people have enough to live on, there is no more exploitation, and tears are wiped away. The church can help build this Kingdom, but so can secular actors, for example political liberation movements. God's Kingdom transforms and perfects this world, it does not destroy it. And in Christ, all people are already justified before God and entitled to be part of this Kingdom. Mission means actively

working to build the Kingdom of God, i.e. working to improve the world and inviting people to join in.

I admit that the juxtaposition of these two positions is a little simplistic; hardly anyone has taken them to such an extreme. But it helps us at the moment to understand the disputes between the so-called 'evangelicals' and 'ecumenists' that characterized the missionary-theological debates in the 1970s to 1990s.

At the ecumenical World Mission Conference in Bangkok in 1968, delegates from the global South in particular identified liberation movements as movements of the Spirit of God, and the powers of the global North that fought these movements (for example the USA in the Vietnam War) as anti-God. The *Missio Dei* therefore took place outside and against the churches! The delegates demanded that the churches of the North should free themselves from their Babylonian captivity, take the side of the liberation movements and work with them to change the world in the direction of the Kingdom of God. In 1969, for example, the World Council of Churches (WCC) launched the Program to Combat Racism (PCR) and in the following decades promoted liberation movements in southern Africa in particular. But for many WCC member churches in the global North, this went too far.

The evangelical Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization in 1974 initially stuck to a rather outdated understanding of mission: the aim of mission was to convert people so that they would have eternal life – and the proclamation of this message remained the task of all Christians. However, the churches and organizations represented in Lausanne also reflected on the improvement of human life. They emphasized that alongside evangelism, i.e. the proclamation of the

Word, there must be a holistic witness to God's love, which is expressed in political action and the assumption of social and diaconal responsibility. Otherwise the evangelistic witness would not be credible. However, this aspect was mainly introduced by delegates from the global South; many *white* evangelicals still like to concentrate on the salvation of souls. Political and social structures are only considered in terms of whether and how they promote or hinder the mission of evangelization. And if *white* evangelists profit from economic injustice and racism, that is not a problem.

When I was studying theology in the late seventies and early eighties, mission theology was hotly and controversially debated. The rifts between 'ecumenists' and 'evangelicals' were deep and mutual distrust was fierce. And yet the discussions led to both sides developing further:

Evangelicals were questioned and began to ask themselves how it would actually be possible for a loving God to allow billions of people to be lost and consigned to eternal hellfire. And the ecumenical enthusiasm in the evaluation of liberation movements was dampened by the experience that the political liberation of countries repeatedly tipped over into new oppression and exploitation. Developments in Vietnam, Zimbabwe and later Nicaragua clearly demonstrated this.

Over the years, a majority position developed across all camps that it was genuinely part of the missionary mandate of the church to help improve conditions in the world. Of course, missionary societies had been building hospitals, schools and diaconal institutions since the middle of the 19th century, but this work had always been seen as an 'accessory' to the actual mission of preaching and evangelizing. Since the late 1970s, however, there has been talk of 'holistic mission', i.e. a mission to people that focuses not only on their spiritual,

but also on their physical needs. After all, this is what Jesus did when he preached the Kingdom of God and healed the sick. And unlike the earlier missionaries, this holistic mission did not only focus on individual people, but also programmatically set its sights on changing unjust structures. What use is the Good Samaritan, it was asked, if the government does not ensure that there are no more bandit attacks on the road to Jericho?

What all these different approaches have in common, however, is that mission is seen as instrumental, as a productive activity. What the church does as an instrument of God has a measurable goal: either the growing number of baptized church members or the visible transformation of the world towards better conditions. But what happens if neither works?

This question arises above all in Europe, which is undergoing a massive process of secularization. Churches are shrinking and only a few people are being won over to the Gospel. At the same time, social services are being cut back in many European countries – social services that would probably never have been developed without the Christian influence on the European continent.

In this situation, European mission theologians have begun to think of mission as a 'virtue', as a quality and an action of the church that is not measured by quantitative results, but by whether it lives up to the mission of Christ. And this mission is not to save souls or to build the Kingdom of God on earth (however fragmentary!), but to give the world a foretaste, a sign of the Kingdom of God that God himself will establish.

The aim of mission is therefore neither to increase the number of converts, nor to maintain and enlarge churches, nor to transform society!

Rather, mission is to follow Christ and live in community as a sign of what the Kingdom of God is all about: lovingly accepting each person as they are; sharing possessions; healing the sick and casting out demons; preserving the world as God's good creation, and as this community constantly searching for where Christ, where God's Spirit is at work in this world, and sharing this discovery with others. And finally, to intercede priestly for the people around us.

This mission is carried out in the knowledge that the actions of our Christian communities are broken, often unrecognizable and wrong time and again. But it trusts that God's Spirit works not only through, but also despite our efforts, and that God will bring God's Kingdom Himself in the end. A bit like the torn clown with the mangy donkey who travels through the villages and announces the circus, which is so much more wonderful than this messenger can tell … Especially in post-Christian Europe, where Christians are becoming a minority, this is an encouraging approach.

* * *

The brief passage through missionary theological discussions and insights that you have just read has a major problem. It is only part of the picture.

A few snapshots to make the bigger picture visible:

In 1906, a small Black congregation on Azusa Street in Los Angeles gave birth to a revival movement that permanently changed world missions within a very short time. Blacks and *whites,* women and men alike experienced the overwhelming presence of God's spiritual power, which was expressed in tongues. Those present understood these events as a new Pentecost.

Convinced that they could now speak a foreign language, hundreds of people set off around the world to preach the Gospel. Once they arrived in Chile, Sierra Leone or China, they quickly realized that this was actually not the case. But instead of giving up in discouragement, they looked for local translators, preached, prayed (often successfully) for healing from illnesses and founded numerous so-called Pentecostal churches within a very short space of time, most of which were led by local Christians from the beginning. As these missionaries almost always set out without any organizational backing, little is known about them.

But this missionary movement was enduring: today, Pentecostals (Pentecostal and charismatic churches) make up a good quarter of global Christianity. (A good 50% are Catholics, around 12% Orthodox, and a good 10% classical Protestant).

* * *

While the Protestant churches of the Global North sent their missionaries all over the world and jealously ensured that the newly emerging churches were as similar as possible to their home churches, the Gospel kept spilling out of these enclosed spaces.

Two examples:

William Wadé Harris was a Liberian evangelist from the Protestant Episcopal Church. A vision changed his life from the ground up; from 1913 he traveled through West Africa as a free, itinerant evangelist and prophet, preaching, healing, converting thousands of people and founding his own independent African church, which still exists today.

The Chinese Wei Enbo (Paul Wei), initially an employee of the London Missionary Society in Beijing, became acquainted with the Pentecostal movement through a Norwegian missionary. In 1917, he felt called by the power of the Holy Spirit to found an independent Chinese church without foreign missionaries. The True Jesus Church (Zhen Yesu Hui), a Pentecostal church, still exists today and has more than 3 million members worldwide.

* * *

Even if hardly anyone today defends a world conquest approach in terms of missionary theology, it still plays a major role in practice. The Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization brings together many organizational players who strategically consider how "the unreached" can be evangelized as quickly and effectively as possible. Such organizations often originate from the USA, such as Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) or Evangelism Explosion, whose evangelism training courses are widespread in Indonesia. Similarly, Korean missionaries are also active worldwide, founding churches and building and providing theological training centers. However, if you ask around in the Global South, you will hear that these organizations and their employees are perceived as colonial and controlling, and that local churches are looking for ways to become more independent of them.

* * *

Finally, there are huge missionary movements from the Global South to the entire world.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God, a Pentecostal church that emerged in Nigeria, defines its mission simply as follows:" 1) To go to heaven. 2) To take as many people with us as possible. 3) To have a member of the RCCG in every family in every country in the world." The Church of Pentecost, based in Ghana, has planted churches in 151 countries over the last 20 years. Indigenous churches from many other countries in the Global South are active in missionary work worldwide.

These churches spread a Christianity that is very much unlike colonial white European Christianity in terms of theology or practice.

Missionary Christianity from the Global North has essentially aligned itself with the Reformation doctrine of justification: People are sinners and separated from God. That is why God sent Jesus Christ, who died vicariously for the forgiveness of sins. Through Christ we are justified, can live a life according to God's commandments in faith and will enter the Kingdom of God after our death. However, we often believe this against appearances. Evangelism consists of witnessing and explaining this message to people.

Missionary Christianity from the South, on the other hand, is often characterized by a Pentecostal theology of power: People's lives are threatened and enslaved by evil forces. Jesus came into the world and died to defeat these powers. His resurrection seals the victory over the evil powers; all those who believe in him already share in this victory. This can be seen concretely in earthly life in the healing of illnesses and in blessings in the family and at work. Evangelism is

power evangelism, confrontation with life-destroying powers through healing the sick and casting out demons. Christian life is characterized by physically tangible experiences of the presence of God's spiritual power: speaking in tongues and trance states are part of worship.

* * *

These snapshots are also only excerpts. Mission theology and mission practice are colorful and varied, contradictory and diverse. This will also become clear in the rest of this book.

Chapter 2

What the colonial past means for mission today

In Germany, I often meet people who say: The entire project of world mission was so closely linked to colonialism that it cannot be saved. Mission is inherently colonial and intrusive, always and everywhere. That is why we should stop talking about mission and stop doing it. What we need instead is dialogue with people of other faiths, and to join with them in seeking to make this world a better and more peaceful place.

Fidon Mwombeki, the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, does not agree. In conversations, he has repeatedly made it clear that condemning all mission as colonial is not nuanced enough. And anyone who thinks that the missionized could not distinguish between colonizers who exploit them and missionaries who want to bring them the gospel is treating the people of the Global South as stupid and is thus caught in colonial thought patterns themselves.

“We can distinguish between missionaries and colonialists!”

by Fidon Mwombeki (Nairobi, Kenya)

When I visited North Sumatra in 2009, people of the Karo Church proudly showed us the graves of the first missionaries. Long after the end of the missionary era, the church rebuilt these graves and maintains them in an impressive way. A pastor told us: “These are the people who brought us the Gospel. They are one of us.” It was no different on the southern shore of Lake Toba, where the entire family of Ludwig Nommensen, the first missionary of the Rhenish Mission Society to the Batak, is buried. The villagers respect the graves, and the children we met nearby were aware of their significance: the Nommensen family belongs to the Batak people.

The population knew and still knows today that missionaries and colonialists were not the same. The missionaries lived with the people in their communities, ate their food, entered their modest homes and even slept there. They learned their language, set up schools and modern medicine, touched and washed the wounds of their sick and lived in remote rural areas with no certainty about the future.

The colonizers, on the other hand, did not respect the people, but ruled over them only with an iron fist. They never did what the missionaries did – the colonizers did not come into our homes, they did not touch our sick. Instead, they bought large plots of land, made the local labor force work for them, and took everything they owned from the people.

The missionaries, on the other hand, had no business interests and acquired land not for themselves but for the churches and missions. We honor the graves of the missionaries for what they were. And in places where there are no graves, as in Buddhist Sri Lanka, monuments were erected to people like William Ault, the first Methodist missionary in the Batticaloa region, who is still honored today as a pioneer of the modern school system. He did not succeed in

founding a church, but the school he founded is still remembered and his statue stands in the city center.

No wonder many countries remember and celebrate when the first missionary set foot somewhere, and never when they left, because in reality they never left completely. They have become part of the ecumenical experience and symbols of the connection between the sending countries and populations. For the colonizers, there are no such symbols, only contempt, and their graves are not maintained and are largely forgotten.

➥ But it is not quite as simple as Mwombeki's distinction, and that is why a whole series of mission theologians in Africa in particular do not share Mwombeki's assessment. They point out that even as missionaries were committed to evangelizing people, they still associated with colonial expansion and military rule in a way that is difficult for us to understand today.

A particularly blatant case in point was the first German missionary to China, Karl Gützlaff, who actively supported the British army against the Chinese in the first Opium War. In the People's Republic of China, he is now considered a prime example of the entanglement of Western missionaries in colonialism. But here, too, it is important to differentiate, as the Hong Kong pastor Ray Kam shows us:

Karl Gützlaff – A Hong Kong pastor looks back at the China missionary and Opium War hero

by Ray Kam (Hong Kong, China)

On a hidden side street in Central, the main business district of Hong Kong, stands a street sign with the inscription "Gutzlaff Street". Al-

though its origin is unknown to most residents to this day, the street is actually named after Karl F. A. Gützlaff, the first Lutheran missionary in China. In contrast to the easily overlooked street named after him, Gützlaff's history and legacy are impossible to miss for anyone interested in the history of early Protestant missions in China and Asia. However, the focus of interest is not only on his achievements as a missionary, but also on the controversies surrounding him, including his involvement in the Opium War, his position in the British government, which he held until the very end, and the criticism of the mission society he himself founded: The Chinese Union. This chapter offers a brief introduction to his life and work, with a focus on his involvement in the Opium War, followed by reflections from a Lutheran Christian in Hong Kong.

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803-1851) was born and raised in a family of artisans in Pomerania. From the age of eight, he received a formal education in mathematics, history and several languages, including Arabic and Turkish, at a Latin school. His talent and commitment to study, as well as his desire to become a missionary, were recognized at an early age. He later continued his education at the Janickesche Missionsschule and at the Berliner Mission Institute. He was 23 years old at the completion of his training and was then called to the Dutch Mission Society. In 1826, it sent Gützlaff on a mission to Java. But after only two years, he left the society and worked as an independent missionary in South Asia, including in Singapore, Malacca and Thailand. Thanks to his linguistic talent, he mastered Thai and several Chinese dialects. Driven by a calling to spread the Gospel among the Chinese, he traveled to China on a junk, serving as navigator and doctor throughout the journey. The junk set out from Bangkok and used the various ports to distribute medicines and Christian tracts until it finally arrived in Macau. There he met other Protestant missionaries such as Robert Morrison, Elijah Bridgman, Walter Henry Medhurst and Peter Parker. Morrison,

Bridgman, Medhurst and Gützlaff worked together on a Chinese Bible translation project that was completed in 1847. Interestingly, Morrison, Bridgman, and Parker, like Gützlaff, also held secular positions as interpreters, either with their governments or with the East India Company.

Gützlaff's work for the East India Company began shortly after his arrival in Macau, when he signed on as an interpreter on the British ship Lord Amherst. With the East India Company and later with opium traders, Gützlaff made several trips to China with multiple objectives: to explore trade opportunities outside Canton Province, to research tea-growing methods and obtain tea seeds, and to obtain first-hand information about Chinese coastal cities and ports. Although their visits were generally welcomed by the populace because of the trade and the medicine and religious tracts distributed by Gützlaff, their actions, at least according to his reports, caused no little annoyance to the government officials, since it was illegal for foreign ships to enter Chinese ports and to make contact with the native populace. Some officials were even punished for their kindness to the "foreign barbarians." These visits were illegal and inappropriate in the eyes of the Chinese empire, and hostility was shown due to increasing concerns about foreign invasion.

However, Gützlaff saw these trips as a success because the original goals were achieved. While the Chinese kept the technique of growing tea a closely guarded secret, Gützlaff and his company not only procured tea seeds but also recruited tea planters, thus enabling the East India Company to begin growing tea in India. Gützlaff also had the opportunity to observe closely the situation in Chinese cities and coastal military areas. He reported in detail to the Company (some of these reports were forwarded to the British Parliament) and published his observations, claiming that the gateway to China was opening. These publications were widely read in Europe, especially in England, and were used to justify the Anglo-Chinese war, known as the First Opium War.

From 1835, Gützlaff was employed by the British government as an interpreter and took part in various political and military operations. Since a command of the Chinese language (especially the local dialects) was not common among Westerners at the time, interpreters had to perform tasks that went beyond what we would expect of interpreters today. In addition to his regular interpreting work, Gützlaff himself had to organize the supply of food for the operations on the ground, coordinate with Chinese spies to gather information, and even present strategic plans for military operations. He was also involved in drafting and translating the Treaty of Nanjing[1], which was signed by the British and Chinese governments. Before being appointed Chinese Secretary of Hong Kong in 1843, he served as a magistrate in Ningbo and Zhoushan, where he earned a reputation as a capable official. During his term of service in Hong Kong, which at that time was no more than a small fishing village, he contributed to the development of this new British outpost with his solid achievements. He died in Hong Kong in 1851 at the age of 49 and was buried in the Hong Kong Cemetery.

Gützlaff's intense secular engagement did not prevent him from doing missionary work. There is evidence of him regularly visiting villages and communities to preach the gospel and distribute religious leaflets. For Gützlaff, proclaiming the gospel and delivering the word of God (also in the form of tracts) were of the utmost importance in missionary work. As mentioned earlier, medicines were also distributed to the sick. In addition to his personal evangelism work, he founded two Chinese missionary societies, the Chinese Evangeliza-

1 This treaty is still regarded in the People's Republic of China as a prime example of colonial exploitation under the guise of law. With the conclusion of the treaty, the United Kingdom was able to achieve almost all of its war aims formulated before the start of the war. The treaty regulated the annexation of Hong Kong, the payment of a large sum as compensation, the abolition of previous legal practices in trade and diplomacy, the release of all British citizens in China, and an amnesty for Chinese collaborators.

tion Society and the Chinese Union, to send preachers to evangelize the Chinese people.

Two points are worth mentioning regarding Gützlaff's missionary approach. First, he placed a high value on culturally appropriate missionary practice, as evidenced by the large number of his Chinese religious writings. A capable writer, he not only authored tracts and books that explicitly proclaimed the Gospel message, but also at least seven Chinese novels. These novels covered various topics, including criticism of the unjust behavior of Chinese officials towards their own people, contrasts between Chinese and Western culture, Buddhism and Christianity, etc. Gützlaff hoped that lay people would also read these novels, which is why he used a simple, dialogical writing style. The second point is that Gützlaff was keen to train and send Chinese preachers. He encouraged them to observe and recommend new believers so that they could receive the same training and become preachers too. According to the Union's report, such an approach resulted in a large number of converts. This emphasis on empowering native Christians was remarkable, even if the quality of these preachers and the authenticity of the reports themselves were questioned by his contemporary missionary colleagues.

All this suggests that Gützlaff was indeed a talented, passionate and adventurous person, and these qualities would normally make a successful missionary. However, his involvement in the opium trade and war was difficult for Christians then and still is today. How can you preach the Gospel and distribute medicine on the one hand, and support the opium trade on the other? His ministry may have brought income for his missionary work, but should not the Gospel be holistic and bring holistic blessings to the recipients? Gützlaff's missionary approach at this stage seems to have been more focused on evangelism, while other aspects such as social reform and diaconia were neglected.

There are a few possible reasons for Gützlaff's involvement in the opium trade. As an independent missionary, he did not receive regular support from missionary societies and therefore needed a salary from a secular job to sustain his ministry. Jardine Matheson, an opium smuggling company, promised Gützlaff the printing of tracts and other publications. Nevertheless, Gützlaff wrestled with his decision and later regretted it. This reminds us that even gifted missionaries and Christians are not immune from failure. Mission history is not a record of successes but of how limited individuals and communities are used by God for the benefit of others. Important persons should not be held up as heroes, and mistakes should be boldly admitted. I believe this is especially important for Lutheran believers like me, since we are taught to place our trust in Christ alone and not in other heroic figures.

Compared to his involvement in the opium trade, Gützlaff's direct participation in the Opium War was even harder to accept, because he promoted the idea that a war with China would serve the evangelization of the Chinese people. Although Gützlaff respected Chinese language and culture as a means of missionary work, he still believed that Western Christian culture was superior and more advanced than Chinese Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist culture. Since Chinese emperorship and government were so closely tied to that culture, Gützlaff saw no place for Christianity unless China was opened by an outside force. Gützlaff also believed that the advance of Western technology and culture would improve the living standards of the Chinese people, and he hoped that China could become part of world Christianity. These considerations explain his proactive participation in the warfare. To be fair, Gützlaff's attitude was shared by many contemporary missionaries. Some of his missionary colleagues also held secular positions for governments or trading companies.

However, Gützlaff's actions led to the tragic conclusion that Christianity was associated with the Western invasion. And because the

military, traders and missionaries were intertwined, the Chinese inevitably experienced Christianity as a means of imperialist and cultural invasion. Even today, this understanding is widespread in China, and Gützlaff's dual role as a missionary and British official is often cited as proof of this. The missionaries' attitude of cultural and religious superiority, their pursuit of a Western-style Christianity combined with overly aggressive missionary work led to rejection and hostility in China. In the 19th and 20th centuries, protest movements against Christianity and Western powers erupted, and one of the reasons for this was military invasion supported by missionaries. For Christians today, this is a painful lesson when dealing with non-Christian cultures and religions. Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God, not earthly Christianity; religion should never be a cause for war. Furthermore, any sense of superiority of our own religion and culture could be detrimental as it prevents us from being truly respectful of others.

Despite all this, I have a forgiving and sympathetic view of Karl Gützlaff. Hong Kong undoubtedly benefited from British rule, as it developed from a tiny village into one of Asia's global metropolises in less than 200 years. Gützlaff's contribution has left a mark on history and can still be seen today. He proposed the construction of a botanical garden in Hong Kong, which is still a wonderful place in the heart of the city today. More importantly, Gützlaff advocated and promoted state funding for local schools. Although he did not live to see the fully subsidized school system, his proposal was the starting point for the later state system. Churches and missionary societies were able to operate state-funded schools where religious education and activities were allowed. Today, there are over 2,000 kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, about half of which are run by churches or missionary societies. The schools became an important place where children, including me, first came into contact with the Christian faith, and Gützlaff certainly deserves credit for his contribution.

➥ It is clear: mission and colonialism, mission and racism were closely interwoven, but their complicated relationship is not easy to assess today. But we are talking about the past, aren't we?

I'm afraid not! Because I have learned over the years and am still learning how much the history of colonialism and racism still shapes mission today – often unconsciously and subliminally, because we don't want to be racists and colonialists!

I believe that it is therefore of central importance for a postcolonial understanding of mission that we *white* people in the global North come to terms with the colonial and racist history of our own missionary organizations and learn from this history. And so I would now like to turn our attention to a particularly dark chapter in the history of my own missionary organization.

Johannes Spiecker, the Rhenish Mission and the Genocide of the Herero and Nama

In the years 1905-1907, Johannes Spiecker, the then Mission Inspector for Africa of the Rhenish Mission Society[2], undertook a trip to German South West Africa, today's Namibia. He had the task of visiting and inspecting the individual mission stations, since Germany was unable to effectively monitor them.

Spiecker's journey took place during the period of the German genocide of the Herero, whose rebellion against German colonial rule had been bloodily suppressed in 1904. In response to the treatment of the Herero, the Nama rose up from 1905; their rebellion was also brutally suppressed until 1908. From late 1904, the Germans set up concentration camps

2 The Rhenish Mission Society was later incorporated into the United Evangelical Mission.

in South West Africa where captured Herero and Nama were subjected to the harshest forced labor under terrible living conditions. Not even half of the prisoners survived.

Johannes Spiecker kept a diary of over 2,000 pages about his journey, so we can get a very precise idea of what he experienced and how he interpreted his experiences.

The diary clearly shows that Spiecker was aware of the cruelty with which the German troops were treating the rebels. He therefore repeatedly engaged in highly critical discussions with senior colonial officials and military officers, whose deeply racist contempt for Blacks he explicitly did not share. He also hoped that the work of the mission could help to prevent further uprisings and subsequent 'punitive actions' by the German military. However, this did not lead him to critically question German colonialism. He describes colonialism and the forced development positively; he only complains about what he experiences as its negative and immoral excesses.

Two quotations show this ambiguity:

In his diary, Spiecker approvingly reports that the missionaries of the Rhenish Mission are setting up collection points where Herero can surrender to the Germans. (The German General von Trotha had driven many Herero into the Omaheke Desert and closed off all water sources, a brutal method of killing which the missionaries were aware of.)

> *"If our mission or the people (Christians) sent by them do not come for them, the government will have to deal with these gangs for years to come, if it ever gets done with them at all."*

The Herero from these assembly points were then transferred to concentration camps. Spiecker was aware from conversa-

tions with his colleague August Kuhlmann how terrible these camps were:

> *"People come with Kuhlmann's messengers, who he has very cleverly selected and who absolutely trust him. But Kuhlmann is very worried about the people's future … They are then sent to Omaruru and from there to Karibib and Swakopmund, where many of them will die. … If only the governor ensures that the people are treated well, as promised. … I tried to calm him (Kuhlmann) by pointing out that the people were in God's hands."*

August Kuhlmann, who wanted to help the Herero, was caught in a dilemma: In the desert, they would starve and die of thirst; if they surrendered, they would be transferred to concentration camps. As terrible as this prospect was, at least the Herero had a chance of survival there.

Spiecker sympathized with Kuhlmann's concern; but despite his repeated criticism of the colonial government and the German military, he ultimately resorted to a theologically justified fatalism: the Herero were in God's hands. Spiecker, a Lutheran, was shaped by the doctrine of the two realms: the authorities are appointed by God and even if acting unjustly, they cannot be fundamentally rejected. And at the same time, this theology relieves his feelings of guilt: it is not the missionaries or the colonial government, but God who is responsible for the Herero.

And finally, Spiecker was probably aware of a simple fact of history: even with the best will in the world and the harshest criticism, the mission probably could not have prevented the crimes of the colonial government.

Later, Spiecker observed a column of Herero forced laborers building the Ovambo Railway:

> *"It was a pleasure to watch them, how the work progressed so briskly and was carried out with such zeal, even by young boys. … When I expressed the view that the pay was too low for the hard work, Brother Eich said, 'The people must also feel that they are prisoners.' In my opinion, too, this hard school will be good and beneficial for them."*

Here, too, we see Spiecker's double standards: on the one hand, he repeatedly complains in his diary about the 'laziness' of the Blacks, who first have to learn how to work properly. From this colonial perspective, he can endorse the 'hard school' (which is a very euphemistic term for forced labor!). On the other hand, he is aware that the forced laborers receive so little pay for their work that there is a clear relationship of exploitation. However, this criticism is repeatedly dismissed by those around him, who categorize the insurgents as evil and are convinced that they are only experiencing their 'just punishment'.

What does the involvement of the Rhenish Mission in the Namibian genocide mean for me, a *white* German, today?

1. I am part of a story of crime

As a German woman working for the United Evangelical Mission, I am part of a story characterized by great crimes. I am not personally responsible for this, but I also cannot act as if it does not concern me. When I meet Black people in Namibia for the first time today, it is not a meeting in a vacuum. It is a meeting of descendants of traumatized victims with descendants of perpetrators, and even if we never talk about it, it shapes the way we interact. We can only truly meet as equals if we descendants of perpetrators are always aware of this history – because on our side, history is much easier to forget than on the side of the victims.

To face up to a history of crimes also means acknowledging that guilt and asking for forgiveness. The German government refused to do so for over a hundred years for fear of reparation claims. In May 2021, the German and Namibian governments finally agreed to a treaty in which Germany described the events of that time as 'genocide' and asked the descendants of the victims for forgiveness. In addition, Germany has agreed to pay a total of 1.1 billion Euros over 30 years into a program for the development of Namibia as a "gesture of recognition of the immense suffering inflicted on the victims". However, this does not imply any right to compensation.

Herero and Nama organizations criticize this agreement as completely insufficient. For example, a large part of the land that was taken from the Herero and Nama still belongs to *white* settlers today. The Herero and Nama are demanding the return of their stolen land as well as reparations.

For me personally, accepting this history of crimes also means not letting the resulting guilt feelings paralyze me, but rather becoming active. Hearing and supporting the justified criticism of the Herero and Nama. Contributing to making the history of the genocide of the Herero and Nama better known in Germany, to having it included in German schoolbooks. To mention the names of the Black leaders, Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witboi, who are almost unknown in Germany because they are almost never mentioned even in critical historiography, unlike the German perpetrators. And to keep the knowledge of this history alive in my own organization as well.

2. Becoming aware of my own blind spots

When I read the excerpts from Johannes Spiecker's diary, I am shocked. By his lack of empathy, his racist arrogance, his

pious self-assurance. It is easy to distance oneself from this: Thank God I am not like that …

But that is cheap. Do I know how I would have behaved and spoken if I were Spiecker? Who says that I would have done better?

And so, of course, I can also deal with this story of crime by relativizing it. The missionaries were just children of their time; back then, everyone was racist and colonialist, especially in the church. But today we are no longer like that.

But is that true? Who actually says that we are doing better today? Why do critics of the colonial mission so readily assume that we are more just today than the missionaries of that time?

Do I actually know where I overlook injustices? And that leads me to my third, most important insight:

3. Continuities that shape me

The racist and colonial past is not over! Even if we are not aware of it or do not want to admit it: colonial and racist patterns shape world politics to this day. And they also influence my individual thinking and feeling. (Incidentally, they also influence the work of mission organizations – Sarah Vecera says something about this in the next chapter!).

Two examples from politics: a vaccine against Corona was available a good year after the pandemic began – but the available doses remained mainly in the global North. Africa in particular received almost none of them.

By contrast, the first clinical tests of a malaria vaccine, which finally came onto the market in 2021, began as early as 1998! And it is only this year, 2024, that a better vaccine is coming onto the market – but it will only be enough for a fraction of the children who urgently need it. Because malaria kills more than a thousand children every day (!), and more

than 18 million people worldwide have died of malaria since 1998. But malaria is a disease of the Global South, it kills black children, and that is why there is little commitment in the Global North to change anything.

Or: Can you remember the last time you saw something about the war in Eastern Congo in the newspaper or on television in Europe or the US? Or the civil war in Sudan? The atrocities that the warring parties in these countries commit against the respective populations are inconceivable, and the number of people killed, maimed and raped runs into the millions! But the victims are Black, and therefore there is little horror about them in the global North. And as long as these wars do not cause us any problems, the states of the global North are not committed to ending these struggles.

But I do not only observe these racist patterns from the outside; they also shape me. Like everyone in this country, I have been socialized to be racist. My racism is more subtle than Johannes Spiecker's, but I cannot deny it. Just one small example: as a *white* woman traveling in the dark on a local train, I used to keep my distance from Black men because I felt a vague sense of threat. Until I started working as a pastor with African immigrant communities: Suddenly, I tended to meet members and elders from African communities on these trains – and the feeling of threat had disappeared! It was only in retrospect that I understood that this feeling was a consequence of my racist socialization.

In short, colonial history is a heavy burden for us, the descendants of the perpetrators. We have to acknowledge it, analyze it and remember it in order to move forward on the path to a post-colonial mission.

But I also learn from our brothers and sisters in the Global South that, alongside and in between all this guilt, there is also a story of blessing from the mission! God can also bring something positive out of human guilt: "You intended evil against me, but God intended it for good." (Genesis 50:20) This is how Joseph, who was sold as a slave by his brothers, sums it up at the end of his life.

And that is my reason for not writing off the mission! Because I know that no matter how hard we try, our human actions are always questionable at best. That's no reason not to try and not to look for the right way to act. But it relieves me of the pressure of having to be perfect and guiltless. The mission is God's mission, and therefore humans cannot destroy it.

A note added for the English version:

The whole analysis above is written from the viewpoint of a white woman from Germany. What do people in the global South learn from mission history? And what do you need to overcome colonial mindsets?

Chapter 3

Mission as a learning community

Looking at history is important to become aware of destructive old patterns. But if we want to rethink mission in a postcolonial way, the next important step is to look at the Bible. After all, Bible texts such as the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:16-20 have often been read as a legitimization of colonial church expansion.

That is why postcolonial mission requires a postcolonial reading of the Bible.

"Invite into your learning community!" What the "Great Commission" really says

written with Gotthard Oblau

Anyone who studies the topic of mission quickly encounters the so-called "Great Commission"[3] in Matthew 28:16-20. Its

3 Please note: The term "Great Commission" never appears in the Biblical text! However, it is used as the heading for this passage in the King James Version and numerous other Bible translations.

message seems clear: the risen Jesus instructs his disciples to set out on a journey to preach the Gospel in faraway lands, to convert pagans and baptize them.

But this passage has not always been understood in this way! The early and medieval church considered this text to be fulfilled: Jesus' instruction was directed at the eleven disciples and no one else; the disciples had taken the Gospel to the world and thus fulfilled their mission. Thus, the text had no further significance for later Christians.

Even when the project of world mission was launched from Europe in modern times, the legitimization provided by this Biblical passage was initially not needed. In any case, the Moravian mission under Count Nikolaus Zinzendorf did not refer to Matthew 28 for the theological justification of its world missionary projects.

The interpretation that we take for granted today comes from William Carey, the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society. He was the first to elevate this text to a classic Biblical reference for world mission in his programmatic booklet, "An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens", published in 1786. It was only since then that Jesus' parting words recorded here have been regarded as "the Great Commission", and the church increasingly adopted the habit of reading them through Carey's interpretative glasses. "Go and make disciples of all nations" also fitted all too well into a colonial program of conquest that made no distinction between Christianity and Western civilization! And to this day, global evangelization organizations that care little about local contexts use this text to justify their actions.

However widespread it may be, such a reading of the "Great Commission" is a misunderstanding and completely misses

the intention of the Gospel of Matthew. If you are reading this chapter now, we ask you to forget everything you have thought and believed about this text so far. Please go and read this Bible passage with us from start to finish with an open mind. This will take some time and work, but we can't avoid that.

First of all, almost all of the common English Bible translations are inaccurate and imprecise in this passage. This is not least due to the fact that the Greek sentences here have a grammatical structure that allows for a number of different interpretations. In the following, we have provided our own translation:

> *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. And when they saw him, they kneeled down before him, but some doubted. And Jesus stepped near to them and said: God has given me all authority in heaven and on earth. Get going, and let all peoples learn together with you. Immerse them into the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have told you to do. And see, I am with you every day, to the end of time.*

The following text analysis poses four questions:

1. **Where does Jesus speak?**
2. **Who does he address?**
3. **What is the mission?**
4. **How is it justified?**

1. The place: a mountain in Galilee – a mission from the margins

Verse 16: *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.* In the concept of

Matthew's Gospel (unlike Luke's!), Galilee is the starting point of the Christian mission. This means:

a) Mission does not come from the political center of power in Jerusalem, but from the hinterland, from the margins. Galilee was a poor, underdeveloped area in Jesus' time and a religious and ethnic mix: Jews lived there alongside gentiles. Seen from Jerusalem, therefore, a dubious starting point!
b) Galilee is the region where Jesus healed the sick, shared his wisdom and his bread with the poor, and called people out of their fishing boats and tollbooths to follow him. It was on a mountain in Galilee that Jesus interpreted and radicalized the Torah (the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7) and allowed three of his disciples to see his glory and equality with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17).

2. The addressees: eleven disciples, in worship and full of doubt – not perfect Christians

Verse 16: *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee.* They are not called apostles here! In the Greek text they are called *mathätái,* students, people who are learning. They are not the teachers of those who are to be evangelized. They themselves are still on the way, as lifelong learners. (See also Matt. 23:10)

The eleven disciples went to Galilee. The number eleven reminds us that one of the twelve betrayed Jesus. They are no longer a complete group, no longer the symbolically full and holy number. We are reminded of the one who betrayed Jesus, and that casts a certain shadow over the eleven: the disciples are sinners, imperfect people and potential failures.

Verse 17: *When they saw him, they kneeled down before him; but some doubted.* The Greek wording here is so terse that it can translated in different ways: even though some doubted / though some doubted / but they doubted / yet others doubted.

What were they doubting, exactly? That the man standing before them was the living Jesus, the risen Christ. They were doubting the resurrection, a key element of the Christian creed.

Nevertheless, even though they doubt, they bow their knees. And that – that gesture, that formality – is their qualification, not their thoughts and convictions.

Furthermore, we must not forget that the disciples did not have a high level of education. Several were fishermen without formal qualifications. Imagine something like this today: newly converted people, still full of doubts and uncertainties in their faith, even people without a high school diploma, are entrusted with a mission by the church! Jesus did it, and so did Paul.

Verse 18: *And Jesus stepped near to them and said …* Jesus himself bridges the distance, he is not deterred by their distance and doubts. Jesus calls and qualifies them.

3. The commission: forming a learning community

Jesus' commission in verses 19-20 contains a series of four verbs. In the original Greek, however, only one of them is in the imperative, and only this forms the main verb of the sentence: *mathätéusate!* The other three verbs are participle constructions and subordinate to the imperative. Unfortunately, this construction is not visible in any English Bible translation, and the verbs are also translated in such a way that the actual intention of the mission is obscured rather than made visible. That is why we have to look very closely here!

Make disciples *(mathätéusate)* – invite into your learning community!

Make them into disciples – This translation distorts the original intention. After all, those who are sent here are disciples

themselves. So the logic is: Make them into what you already are. Invite them to do what you are already doing.

A "disciple" is, from its original Greek meaning *(ho mathätäs),* a student or apprentice – one who is learning. Think of the cars in Great Britain with that huge big "L" in the rear window. This says: Attention, still learning! Every disciple of Jesus should carry this big red "L": "Attention, I am learning from Jesus!" Except that as an apostle and a Christian, you would wear this patch for life. Because in the school of Jesus, you never stop being a disciple – and thus a learner.

So, Jesus' command is now issued to these lifelong learners: Make others learners too! Get them to learn with you! Study the words of Jesus together with them and try them out together! The "Great Commission" downplays the difference between the evangelists and the evangelized. It does so programmatically and as a matter of principle. All together – those who have been around longer and those who are new – are still going to school, sharing the same classroom, the same school desks.

So if everyone is learning together, beginners and advanced learners alike, who is the teacher then? The teacher of all is Christ, the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount. (cf. Matt. 23:10!)

Let all nations learn together – learn in intercultural groups!

Why does Jesus actually say "all peoples", or, as many translations have it, "all nations", and not "people from all nations"?

The term "people/nation" is somewhat problematic in English. Translating the Greek word *ta ethnä* as people/nation implies three possible misunderstandings.

Firstly, the romantic modern-day misunderstanding – nations are groups of people who each populate the same

linguistic, cultural, spiritual and territorial space. In Protestant mission, this has led to individual mission societies each concentrating on certain linguistic and ethnic groups and founding their own churches among them. But in many areas of the world, people from different ethnic and language groups live next to each other in the same place. Thus, in villages in North Sumatra, there are sometimes three church buildings next to each other, belonging to three different churches, each holding services in a different language. People who live together in everyday life are separated from each other by their Christian faith.

Secondly, the fascist misunderstanding – as if peoples were sharply defined collective entities, locked in a struggle for existence. This is currently being relaunched in Europe and in the US in the new right-wing milieus and in right-wing extremist political parties, and continues to influence thinking well into the so-called mainstream. As a consequence, quite a few Christians believe that people of Muslim faith are enemies of Christians who want to take away 'our Christian Occident'.

And thirdly, the civic misunderstanding of the present – as if nations were a matter of legally and territorially clearly defined affiliations with borders, passports, nationalities and legal communities. In Germany, this has led to the Protestant churches primarily seeing themselves as churches for German citizens. Thus, German parishes are founded for Germans abroad and separate "parishes of other languages and origins" are supported in Germany, instead of living together as a church locally.

But none of this is intended here! The Greek *ta ethnä* is the translation of the Hebrew word *gojim,* which simply describes all people who do not belong to the chosen people of Israel. So Jesus does not speak here about demarcated peoples, ethnic

groups or nations, but about a mission from God with universal reach – somewhat like Abraham's mission in Gen 12. Just as all people are to find blessing in and through Abraham, so they are to benefit from and share in the Jesus-induced learning process of Christians.

The fact that Jesus says "all nations" here and not just "people from all nations" is programmatic: the risen Christ alludes to the prophets Isaiah and Micah, who expect for the end of time that all nations *(gojim)* will come to Mount Zion to learn God's law, and that a time of peace and justice for all will then dawn (Isaiah 2:1-5; Micah 4:1-5). This time has now begun, only that the direction of movement has been reversed: it is not the gentiles who come to Zion, but the followers of Jesus go to people of all languages and ethnic backgrounds and establish learning communities all over the world.

But it is not written here that these learning communities should be ethnically segregated! Rather, we understand the mission like this: let people from all gentile tribes, clans and ethnic groups learn together with you! Set up Jesuanic classrooms made up of Jews and gentiles, and of people from all possible backgrounds and affiliations.

The purpose and goal of mission is a process of learning and trial and error in the context of cross-cultural, mixed-religious and international encounters, because intercultural learning goes deeper and further than learning in homogeneous groups. Mission aims at learning – not the other way around. Because messianic learning is a never-ending process.

Teach them to do everything I have told you to do – incorporate Jesus' teachings into the learning process and live by them together!

In the original text, the word teaching as a participle is assigned to the imperative verb. Accordingly, it would be more appropriate to translate it as follows: Find fellow learners by incorporating the words and instructions of Jesus.

This is the only advantage the Jewish disciples have over their non-Jewish fellow students: the apostles manage the teaching material, the textbooks. The tradition of the Torah (that is, what we know as the Old or First Testament) is first entrusted to Israel. The apostles bring it into the international learning communities, together with their interpretation by Rabbi Jesus. That is what makes them teachers: they put the Torah on the table.

And so it is clear: we Christians who do not come from the Jewish tradition do not even have this head start! We are even more learners who must allow themselves to be corrected and brought into line again and again.

So what did Jesus command? The Gospel of Matthew names three of Jesus' commandments.

The first of these can be found in Matthew 4:17: *Change your lives! For the Kingdom of Heaven is now drawing near to people.* This is an allusion to the first commandment: *I am the Lord your God! I brought you out of the land of Egypt – out of a life of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me!* Jesus announces the approaching reign of God – just as the Hebrew slaves had already experienced the approaching reign of God in the form of their liberation. In return, God expects the liberated to be loyal to their liberating God.

Accordingly, Jesus expects people to turn to God, whose accession to power is imminent.

The second of Jesus' commandments is: *Come, follow me!* Disciples are people who follow Jesus, that is, they live according to the spirit of his commandments.

The third: *Let your light shine before people. They shall see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* A life of discipleship, a life according to the commandments of the Torah, is exemplary. It is attractive to others. People are willing to believe that it is a good religion, with a true God. Here, too, Jesus alludes to Isaiah and Micah: the nations come to live according to the instructions of the God of Israel because Israel is a good example of this (Isaiah 2:2-5; Micah 4:1-5).

> The "Great Commission" is therefore aimed at being faithful to Jesus in our daily lives. Christians are people who ask themselves how they embody the will of Jesus in the here and now, and in doing so they are also, more or less incidentally, missionaries.

Get going – set yourselves in motion!

This is also a participial construction in the original Greek. Literally translated, it should therefore mean: By setting out, you will find fellow learners from all over the world. Or: As people who set out, learn with all you find everywhere.

If, on the other hand, the participle is translated as an imperative, it takes on a weight as the starting word of the "Great Commission" that it does not really deserve.

Go! – Go! – Set out! In modern times, such a command has conjured up the whole arsenal of mobility possibilities and long-distance travel dreams. Go! Set out! Cross oceans, cross deserts, overcome the most distant mountains!

In some translations, this is even topped by wrongly assigning the "peoples" to the mobility order. Instead of "make all nations co-learners", it then says: Go to all nations! How many Bible readers believe, for example, that the text reads: Go into all the world!

The participle *poreuthéntes* comes from the verb *poreuomai* and its basic meaning is to go, travel, or move. But Jesus doesn't say where the disciples should go! And if you read Matthew's Gospel more closely, you'll notice that Matthew likes to use this participle when he wants to emphasize an imperative. For example, in Matthew 9:13 – *Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."* This is not about going. The command is: Now learn it! Don't just sit on your lazy backside!

That is why the "Great Commission" is not a travel command. It is just an invitation to get up, to stop loafing, to turn to action, to come down from the mountain top.

Immerse them in God's realm of power! (Learning by immersion)

Almost all Bible translations translate verse 19b as follows: *"Baptize them in the name of the Father …"* This is probably because this passage from Matthew 28 is read in every baptismal service and it is difficult to break with tradition. But this translation is actually wrong!

The Greek verb *baptizein* originally meant nothing more than to dip, and this does not necessarily mean immersion in water. It was only later in the Christian church that the verb became a technical term for baptism.

But here the element into which people are immersed is explicitly mentioned, and it is not water: Immerse them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The preposition of direction is important here: "into". In the Greek text, *eis* (into) is in the accusative case, and not *en* (in) with the dative. So the translation: *Baptize them in the name of God …* contradicts the original Greek text! And it distorts the intention again: baptizing in the name of God is an act of authority. (And how theologians have argued over who is allowed to baptize!)

The correct reading, on the other hand, would be this: *Turn them into learners by immersing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to do everything I told you to do.*

The range of meanings of the Greek verb *baptizein* corresponds quite well to that of the English verb to immerse: to plunge, embed, familiarize. "Immerse them in learning": this is a learning method! In English, this is very aptly expressed as learning by immersion! This is the best way to learn foreign languages, for example. You immerse yourself in the foreign-language environment and give up all contact with your mother tongue for a while. In this way, one quickly begins not only to hear and understand in the target language, but also to speak, think and dream in it.

The same learning method is intended here: learning by immersion. This also makes sense if one realizes what is meant by the "name" of God. The name of God is not just a formal basis for legitimation. Rather, the name of God is a space filled with God's power and radiance. It is the space in which God's reign is already breaking in and becoming tangible – a space in which people accept God's word and actions, hope, tell and sing about it – a space in which God's instruction (the Torah, *"all that I have told you to do")* is honored, learned, promoted and done. In other words, the "name" of the triune God is the gathering and living space of the Christian community.

What Jesus says is nothing less than this:

> Learn with the others, the strangers together, by bringing them into your community! They should not remain guests, not sitting in the gallery as silent listeners. When it comes to immersion, then inclusion is meant, full acceptance. Because faith can only be learned by immersing oneself in Christian community, by participating in its worship, its social service, its interaction with one another, its Bible study, etc.

To do this, you have to give the newcomers tasks and responsibilities – with the same leap of faith that Jesus gave his doubting disciples in his "Great Commission".

4. The indicative of the "Great Commission": the power is with Christ

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Verse 18) Go therefore and make disciples … And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Verse 20b).

Indicative and imperative

The imperative of the "Great Commission", together with its three-part participle construction, is framed by an indicative. The commission is wrapped in a promise, human endeavor is enveloped in divine support. Thus, the last commission that the Matthew-like Jesus gives his disciples is embedded in a very great promise.

The power lies with the risen Christ, not with the disciples he sends out!

Christ's universality is stated at the beginning of the commission (verse 18) in spatial categories ("heaven and earth"), at its end (verse 20) in temporal categories ("all days until the end"). At the beginning, it is described as universal authority (Greek *pasa exousía),* at the end as personal accompaniment: I with you.

It is interesting that Jesus promises the disciples that he will go with them without any time limit. It is also said that Jesus is not subject to any spatial boundary. But here this thought is connected with his all-authority, not with protection and accompaniment for the sent ones. So it is not said, "Wherever you go, I am with you!" Instead, it says, "Every day I will be with you – as long as the world exists!" This is also an indication that the encouragement was not originally conceived as a letter of protection for world-traveling missionaries.

God has given me all power. The Greek term *exousía* means authority, power of attorney, and authority. So it is not about the abstract idea of divine omnipotence, but about the universal authority of a wise ruler. The "Great Commission" is about passing on Jesus' commandments. It is therefore about the spiritual power and persuasiveness of the Torah teacher Jesus, whose authority is derived from the Torah. Its persuasiveness and life-promoting effect is universal and valid and can be experienced all over the world, as the Hebrew Bible testifies.

In the same sense, Jesus' authority will be felt wherever his words are studied, honored and practiced. This is the experience that Jesus' mission aims at: any intercultural conversation about Jesus' words and instructions will lead to the discovery that Jesus is already there with his authority and effectiveness, opening hearts everywhere, setting God's shalom in motion. Where strangers learn alongside each other, the inspirational power of Jesus' words becomes evident

and is reflected in the enthusiasm and learning success of the disciples and students in all peoples and cultures. In this dynamic, the Risen One shows himself to be present. So it is not about bringing Jesus to strangers, but about discovering Jesus with them and among them.

So, to summarize what we can learn from the postcolonial reading of the "Great Commission":
1. Mission begins at the margins; it does not come from the center of power.
2. The ones commissioned to do mission are doubting followers, not perfect Christians.
3. The commission is: form a learning community! In this process, everyone is a learner, some just have a small head start.
4. Christ is present in time and space: we discover him together where we are.

In this chapter, we have asked you to do some challenging Bible work. This is important in order to gain a new understanding of the central text of Western-influenced mission theology. But what does it mean when mission is expressed in a learning community? Here is a practical example.

How we live mission in Cologne-Mülheim

Janneke Botta and Katharina Haubold (Cologne, Germany)

"What does Mülheim need? What do you need? What does the neighborhood need from the church?"

Inspired by how Jesus sent out his disciples (Luke 10), our Christian community in Cologne-Mülheim is trying to be a complementary form of church and to constantly renew itself.

In 2015, Miriam Hoffmann and Sebastian Baer-Henney deliberately approached those in the neighborhood who did not seek contact with the church on their own initiative. They wanted to find out if and what the neighborhood residents would need from and with the church. They sat on the banks of the Rhine River on a green sofa and with good coffee to get into conversation.

Over seven years, a community emerged that saw itself as a church in the gap. A church for and with those who were looking for a sustainable community and wanted to help shape it. A church for those who wanted to contribute their gifts and questions and longings. And for those who, in doing so, wanted to be open to what transcends us as human beings – to God – in different ways and with varying degrees of intensity. From 2015 to the end of 2021, various forms and formats emerged from the conversations along the Rhine River, giving shape to this "church in the gap". A shop was rented where communal lunches, concerts, different worship formats, cultural events and much more characterized what the Christian community in the neighborhood was all about.

But then, for various reasons, it became increasingly clear that a reformation was needed, a form of "start again". Some community members had moved on and Mülheim as a district had continued to change; some formats had found their way into the everyday life of the local parish in Mülheim and were well established there; some structural questions required changes. A fresh start was needed to

renew the mission of shaping the church to complement what already exists. A fresh start that would begin again with all the momentum of "setting out to meet the people in the quarter". In 2021, the following was formulated:

> *"We believe it is good that much is established. But we also believe that there are new needs. And we ask about these and look at a Mülheim that looks very different than it did seven years ago. It is more political. It is even more colorful. It is questioning. It has energy. It is our task today to immerse ourselves in this if we want to continue what we started seven years ago. So this is the plan: we are starting up again."*

Initially, the "we" will again be two people – a pastor and a community educator, each with a 50% position. We see what we do as missional. For us, mission means an active and intentional participation in God's mission, the Missio Dei. But we are sent not only by God, but also by the church district and the local parish. There are people there who enable, support and stand by us as a sounding board and corrective. The Missio Dei means that no matter where we go, God is always there before us. And no matter who we talk to, God has long been in conversation with that person. In our being sent, we first of all find God in new ways in previously unknown places and in emerging relationships. We do not see ourselves first of all as those who have something to bring to others. In these encounters, we are given a great deal for our own faith.

We draw inspiration from verses such as John 1:14, which "The Message" renders as: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14). We ask ourselves what it might look like in practice to "go", "not to carry a purse, not a bag, not sandals, and not to greet anyone" (Luke 10:4), "to look for people of peace" (Luke 10:6) and not to be hosts but guests (Luke 10:7). We ask

ourselves how we can become part of healing processes and discover where and how the Kingdom of God has long since "drawn near" (Lk 10:9). But we also ask ourselves when and how it is time to move on and not impose ourselves (Lk 10:10).

We started without buildings, without events or groups and circles, without contacts to people who want to feel part of the newly emerging forms of Christian community. We started with the conviction that God has long been present in the neighborhood. We want to detect where the Kingdom of God is happening in order to become part of it. We started out of the desire to find relevant forms for church that become access points to the source of vitality and hope for ourselves as well as for others. In doing so, we do not assume that we have a one-sided knowledge of what this source and access to it look like. Our experiences are just as much in need of supplementation as everyone else's. We discover new things in the Bible and in the history of missions and experience creative tensions in this way of understanding and living out mission which both challenge and inspire us.

Intentional and open-ended

For us, mission is part of our own search for God and discipleship, based on our understanding of Jesus Christ and his way of life. For us, mission is not measured by the "results" of our actions. We are not more successful if people come to faith in Jesus Christ (anew), if inspiring forms of church arise or if there are measurable results of our work. We understand that we are divinely sent to live with and among the people in the neighborhood, and to shape our everyday life in love of neighbor and enemy. There is no "in order to" for that …! We don't live in a certain way just so that people can ask us why we do it and then tell them about our faith. We don't share what we have so that people think more highly of the church, or to make us more visible as Christians. We do all of this because it is part of our discipleship. This is important to us because we neither want to use relationships

as a means to an end, nor do we believe that we can "do" mission as a human project. And by living in this way, we are intuitively growing – perhaps even previously untried – forms and formats for spiritual experiences. We want to discover such spaces for experiencing the sacred together, and to allow them to arise because we believe that God acts in them and encounters people.

We are intentional in our mission: to seek God and let ourselves be found by her, as individuals and as a community. At the same time, we are open to the outcome, because we do not define the forms for this in advance. We do not presume to know what it means for other people to experience God or to experience the sacred. We are happy to share what our faith is all about and, with Fulbert Steffensky, we promote "the beauty of a life concept". In doing so, we see ourselves and our faith as in need of supplementation and allow ourselves to be inspired by the spirituality of others. We ask: How are you, God, present here and how do you connect with us? How do you encounter us in other people?

For example, it is important to us to make it clear at concerts in our neighborhood that we want to discover the sacred in music and in being together, but also that it is okay if you can't relate to that and interpret the experience differently. Or when people tell us that they have the impression that "the universe is speaking to us," we wonder whether and how God wants to meet us in that.

Convinced by our own experience and on equal terms

We live from the diverse experiences people have had with God, as we read about them in the Bible. We believe that their essence is reflected in the actions of Jesus Christ. These experiences give us hope. We trust in God's presence in every human being, in this world and beyond, and we draw inspiration from love, faith and hope for our daily lives. We believe that in this reality of God, no one is excluded. For us, this means that we have no "advantage in faith" over any human

being. We want to "meet what is of God in every person." Of course, we bring our own experiences of faith with us and share them where it seems appropriate. Part of this is that we want to be inspired by God's ideas for this world. Our experiences with God strengthen our hope for a just world.

At the same time, we do not see ourselves as the ones whose concept of life is the only beautiful or true one. Instead, we are curious about other perspectives and ways of life. For us, it is crucial to see every person as an expert on their own life in order to engage with each other at eye level and learn from each other. This means, for example, that we do not assume that we know what is good, right or appropriate for others. Therefore, we make sure that our forms and formats allow for conversations at eye level and promote real dialogue. We therefore critically question frontal teaching formats. We trust that God has long been on the road with each person and that we can become companions on this journey. When we are asked, we are happy to share how we understand God and her ideas for our lives and how this shapes our everyday lives, but we listen just as attentively to the stories of others and their interpretations of life.

Being a guest and practicing hospitality

Jesus meets many people where they live and becomes their guest. He engages with people and learns how they live. With the Philippian hymn (Phil 2), one could say pointedly: Jesus inculturated himself for many years in a particular context before he began to work in the way we read about in the Gospels. His examples and parables come from a particular world that he knows well and that shapes him just as much as his identity as the "beloved son of God". The combination of context and God's work in that context gives rise to forms of church that are meaningful for particular people. What the good news is, is always contextual and must be learned and discovered. We understand the Gospel as being "extra nos" (outside of us), we cannot create it

ourselves, and yet we do not come from the outside with a universal truth, but discover good news together with others again and again.

For us, this means that the church becomes a guest. We have no interpretive sovereignty and no domiciliary rights, but depend on doors and worlds of life being opened to us. Where this happens, we experience how little we often know of the lives of others. We would have spoken or acted rashly many times if we had no attitude of listening. In this way, we become the recipients and the receivers. We experience that the "Kingdom of God is at hand" because the sacred is not only found where Christians act or explicit forms of church exist. And so we are the ones to whom God's good news is often unexpectedly preached in word and deed, and who realize how fragmentary our previous image of God and the work of the Holy Spirit was. We are constantly aware of this e and we go to the quarter expecting the world to preach to us, and we are curious to see how this will happen. At the same time, we try to find ways to to encounter each other and God. We share what we have and what we need, and contribute our interpretations. Just as others open up new horizons for us, we also help people discover new ways of accessing reality.

One of our principles is that we never do this just "for others", but that different "we's" arise. That is why it is important to us never to develop formats or ideas in which other people from the neighborhood are not involved. Occasionally, we find ourselves wanting to launch a project – well-intentioned and lovingly thought out. A mindset of "we for the others" is deeply ingrained in us. But we have decided to rein ourselves in, no matter how good we think our ideas are. In this way, different people participate in the preparation of every activity, and at different times there are different "we's", which may also dissolve again. Being a guest also means that we rarely use church premises, but often public spaces. Where we are more familiar with the premises and settings, we try to live a culture of participation. This starts with everyone being able to help themselves to the contents

of the fridge. Liturgies have been developed in which even people who were there for the first time could take on parts if they wanted to. And wherever we have resources available, it is important to us to share them with others.

Rooted in tradition and critical of it

Our way of life and faith has developed over time, as has that of all people. We experience our own tradition as an enrichment, appreciate it and draw inspiration from it for our (spiritual) life. And at the same time, we are critical of it, question it and constantly examine the extent to which it can be relevant for us and the people around us. We try to constantly re-explore what it means at its core and how it can be translated into our context in a new way. This strengthens our own understanding of the (Christian) tradition from which we come and in which we feel at home, and anchors our missional action. What we do is not arbitrary, but rooted in Jesus's actions and the Christian narrative community. And it sharpens our awareness of the extent to which this tradition needs to be reformed. Especially in view of a power-sensitive approach to our understanding of truth and the institution of which we are a part, we experience this as indispensable and are grateful for the view and questions "from the outside".

A critical attitude towards our tradition and church is essential for us. Jesus' good news of justice and the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God also means that we think and act in a feminist, queer-friendly and anti-racist way in order to be credible as non-co-opting people. We listen very carefully when people have had negative experiences with the church. We personally and we as a church have (not only in these points) hurt people and supported unjust structures and sometimes still do. We ask for forgiveness where we are aware of this, and learn a lot from people who have been standing up for these forms of justice for some time. Sometimes we experience de-

fense reflexes or justification mechanisms that kick in in us, and we learn more and more to really take criticism seriously. We continue to educate ourselves in this regard and increasingly practice a feminist, queer-friendly, racism-critical, and inclusive attitude, especially when it challenges us because it touches on painful issues. Wherever we can, we contribute to transforming the "church system" and start with ourselves.

Pilgrims and always arriving anew

The fact that our community has set out on a new search at a time when the established forms could have been well maintained reflects the attitude of being a pilgrim church. As an outpost in the church district, we supplement proven forms of church by repeatedly leaving the familiar to "set out for a land that God will show us" (Gen 12:1). For us, this means leaving behind even the most cherished and familiar forms of church, because they are not meaningful for the environment in which we are traveling (and sometimes also for ourselves). We are trying out forms of spiritual life in public spaces and currently celebrate Holy Communion on the banks of the Rhine River, in the meadows of the neighborhood or on the market square, sometimes with others and sometimes just for the two of us. The tradition of street retreats inspires us to be open and listening as we go about our neighborhood, and to concretely ask: God, where and how are you present here? How do you encounter us and others? What does this mean for the forms of church that can arise here? This attitude of pilgrimage and being on the road on a small scale strengthens us as a team and allows us to find new answers again and again. Forms and formats may come and go and do not have to be designed to last for an ever-recurring period of time. We set out again and again in order to arrive anew each time, and we maintain the attitude that each arrival is always a preparation for a new departure.

Chapter 4

Mission and control

Who actually owns mission? And who controls it? Mission is God's mission, as I wrote in the first chapter; it is the movement of God's Spirit in the world. As a theological proposition, everyone would probably subscribe to that. But it is difficult to draw practical conclusions from it. If we take seriously that mission is God's mission, then we must also trust the Holy Spirit to work differently from what we can imagine and from what we like. Then we have to acknowledge that mission does not only happen within church-organized and controlled structures, but quite often outside of them.

But when we talk about mission in Germany, we usually think of mission organizations: large and small societies within the churches or associations that strategically plan, manage and evaluate mission. We think of people who are trained and educated for this task and who work full-time as missionaries. And think that this mission is the mandate of the rich, white churches in the global North. Mission is what we do (should do), not something we receive.

And here we have to talk about racism again, unconscious racism. Because behind these thoughts are still the ideas that already drove European colonialism: namely, that we *whites* are the ones who are more highly developed, who have the best theology and the best science, and thus have the responsibility to pass this on to the rest of the world (just think of the talk of "developing countries" or "development aid").

In doing so, people tend to forget: "Christianity is a non-Western religion." This saying by the African theologian Lamin Sanneh often causes unease in the global North. But Jesus was a Middle Eastern Jew, as was Paul. The Orthodox churches in Ethiopia, India, Iraq or Armenia are much older than the European churches.

There is also another unspoken idea that we rarely make ourselves aware of: because mission is what *we do,* it is something that we evaluate and control.

With this chapter, I would like to broaden your view: most of what actually happens in mission just happens. Unplanned, unstructured, uncontrolled, often unseen by church leaders and mission managers. In ecumenical missiology, this is described as *"mission from the margins".* Of course, it is a bit questionable to simply define our organizations as the center and what happens outside as the margins. But we have already found the basic idea in Matthew 28: the mission of Jesus' disciples does not begin in the religious center of Jerusalem, but in the marginalized region of Galilee.

"Mission from the margins" also means that this mission is not a strategically planned and carefully managed enterprise. Rather, it simply develops along the way. Or, theologically speaking:

> Mission is the movement of the Holy Spirit's power, even outside of our church activities.

And that is how it has been from the very beginning, by the way. Long before Paul set out on his first missionary journey, the Gospel was being carried throughout the entire eastern Mediterranean region by refugees, displaced persons and travelers. In Acts 11:19-26, we read that it was precisely these refugees and displaced persons in the city of Antioch (present-day Antakya in Turkey) who first told non-Jews about Jesus, and that the emerging community there was first called "Christians". This was a tremendous step, because until then the disciples had only told Jewish people about Jesus. Just how difficult this expansion was can be seen from the fact that Luke places the detailed story of Peter, who is sent by God himself to the non-Jew Cornelius, before the relatively short historical note about Antioch. Luke wants to make sure that we understand: it is the power of the Holy Spirit itself that sends people beyond their limitations into completely new relationships

What is interesting for us today is how the 'mother church' in Jerusalem deals with the revolutionary innovations in Antioch: First, they try to understand what is happening there, and therefore send an expert, Barnabas, to take a look. Barnabas recognizes the movement of the Holy Spirit in the developments and is pleased about them. But he also sees that the new community needs support and more theological knowledge. So he brings the scribe Paul (who, incidentally, has also been a peripheral figure until now!) to Antioch to accompany the emerging community there for a year. And it

is precisely this community that Paul then sends on the first missionary journey.

The Protestant mission of the last 300 years has always been very careful to maintain control. When local Christians read the Bible for themselves and then preached and acted differently from what the missionaries thought was right, they were silenced or expelled from the community. Even today, in the age of concept development, strategic planning and excessive reporting, surprising developments are rarely welcome and find little support from the existing structures.

One example:

With immigration to Germany in the last 50 years, not only Muslims but also many people of Christian faith have come to us. When they discovered that our large beautiful churches are rarely filled on Sundays, many of them felt called to re-evangelize post-Christian Germany. Ghanaian cleaners and Cameroonian engineering students, Korean nurses and Indonesian restaurant owners see themselves as missionaries in Europe.

You are German but you have never heard of this? And you have not met anyone who sees him- or herself as such a missionary? That doesn't really surprise me! Because these missionaries encounter existing churches that believe that mission in their country is their monopoly. Gratitude and joy that people are coming here who want to support our mission – not at all! Instead, only disinterest or defensiveness. Because we cannot control this mission, and it does not correspond to our ideas. The immigrants do not even know or understand our context, and anyway, they practice a kind of Christianity that is not acceptable to us. And then they should first learn German really well and do a German theological

education! (And there is also a good deal of – perhaps unconscious – racism in this attitude: it is unthinkable that Christians from Ghana or Indonesia could teach us with their theology and practice of faith, which is so foreign to us.)

The mission of immigrants in Germany has not been particularly successful so far. In the communities they found, there are usually only other immigrants, and these mostly come from the same cultural background. There are only very few newly founded churches under immigrant leadership in which a larger number of *white* Germans become and remain members. If it were otherwise, the immigrant missionaries would presumably be perceived primarily as competitors. But in this way, people are secretly glad that the immigrant Christians in Germany keep to themselves.

I ask myself: What would have happened if the German churches had already, 30 years ago, identified this missionary movement from the Global South as a movement of the Holy Spirit? And had ensured that a great many 'Barnabasses', experienced German Christians, accompanied immigrant church planters? If there had been bridge-builders who listened carefully to the important and overlooked faith experiences of these missionaries? Who would have ensured that numerous everyday contacts between German and immigrant Christians would have come about, so that both sides would have better understood the culture of the other? Who would have organized German lessons in the newly emerging communities and demanded theological openness from the existing churches?

But this has only happened very rarely. Because for that, German churches would have had to relinquish control. And that is hardly possible in our system. We plan, organize and evaluate as if God did not exist, and call that, with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, mature Christianity. Christians from the global

South see it differently. For example, the Malawian-British mission theologian Harvey Kwiyani.[4]

Mission must reckon with God's action

by Harvey Kwiyani (Liverpool, Great Britain)

I grew up in Malawi during a period of revival, a movement that transformed many nominal Christians into zealous followers of Christ, always ready to pray and evangelize After I left the continent, I learned that this revival of Christianity was a widespread phenomenon that had taken hold almost across all of sub-Saharan Africa and had been going on for decades. In the context of a revival, mission and evangelism are usually very easy. I have seen many people miraculously converted as a result of dreams and other spectacular phenomena. Many of them are still actively following Christ today, 30 years later.

Central to this revival is a theology (informed by African worldview) that assumes God acts for and on behalf of humans. Even in African (traditional) religion, a God who does not heal or provide is useless and has no followers. Why follow a God who cannot protect people from evil forces? The God of Israel, whom we see in the Bible, is Jehovah-Jireh (the God who provides), Jehovah-Rapha (the God who heals or restores) and Jehovah-Sabaoth (the God of hosts), because of course God must help people in this life and not only after death A God whose only promise to humans is eternal life in heaven makes no sense.

Nevertheless, this is the God worshipped by many other Christians, especially in the post-Enlightenment West. Many people profess to be

4 I have included short, provocative thought-provoking ideas from Harvey Kwiyani at various points in this book. They come from his English-language weekly newsletter "Mission. Decolonized", which I recommend to anyone looking for regular thought-provoking ideas on the subject of mission. You can subscribe to it here: http://bit.ly/Kwiyan

followers of Christ but live as if they were atheists. They are functional atheists When they pray, they don't expect (or need) an answer from God. They don't usually have needs to pray for either. They are Christians, but they are so self-sufficient that they don't need any help from God. They live their faith as if everything depends on them: their intelligence, their credit cards, their work ethic, their technology, etc. Many have no space to receive from God, even when God imposes a gift on them. It goes without saying that mission, when carried out by functional atheists, depends to a large extent on their abilities. There is little room for God's help. They cannot recognize their own spiritual needs and cannot respond to the needs of the people they are trying to reach

For this reason, we need to re-mythologize our mission theology. Mission is first and foremost a spiritual endeavor; it must reckon with a God who is actively engaged here in the world.

➥ What Harvey Kwiyani writes here is not only a challenge for our theology, but also for our practice. Not only do the immigrant Christians want to do mission together with us, they also want to change our churches. So we are also supposed to be recipients of mission? This is inconceivable for many German church members and church leaders. We are big, rich churches, we have the responsibility to give! We have to be saviors, don't we?

White Saviorism

by Sarah Vecera (Essen, Germany)

White Saviors save no one – except for the self-image of a good Christian. The poor are Black and the helpers are white. We love and cultivate this narrative everywhere in our churches. We see it in pictures of partnership trips in the parish newsletter, on social media channels of

volunteers and on donation posters. When we list them, we probably already have the images in front of our inner eye: Black children with big eyes, wearing dirty clothes, happily playing with white volunteers The partnership group with the school class in a rural area presents their gifts and on the donation poster we see above all poverty, which should expand our hearts and open our wallets. Shortly before Christmas, these images are at their peak and serve to acquire donations and spread a good feeling. But who actually gets a good feeling from it? Is it really the people we want to help? Or is it more of a self-congratulatory exercise? Are we even allowed to question it so critically when the intention behind it is well-meaning? Few people realize that this is a reproduction and continuation of colonial power structures.

On February 27, 2021, the Ugandan organization "No White Saviors" posted on its Instagram account: "There are no poor people so that you can learn to be grateful for your surplus." A wave of outrage spread in the comment sections. How dare you accuse people who just want to help and do good?

However, they have touched a nerve. In reports from European volunteers, we can also regularly read how incredibly impressive it is that people in their countries of assignment in the Global South are poor but happy and that it is only through them that they themselves realize how grateful they can be for everything they have. And with this realization and gratitude in mind, they are happy to help those who have less, and in this age of digitalization, they are also happy to publicize their own help and giving. But what is the motivation behind it? To inspire others to do something too? Or to present one's own action as a heroic deed? We would hardly admit the latter to ourselves in our modest Protestantism. And yet there is something true about it and it follows an old colonial tradition of thinking

Although the term "white saviorism" seems quite new to us, the origin and the idea go back to colonial times. The intention of white Christian Europeans was already over 150 years ago to save, edu-

cate, convert and cultivate African people. All this happened out of a European sense of superiority. The racist belief that Black people are underdeveloped, childlike, and in need of help existed then as it does now.

The term **"White Savior Complex,"** coined by Teju Cole, describes the phenomenon of the Western savior narrative, in which potential helpers feel called to go to countries in the Global South to help. Usually, they do this out of good motives and also out of their Christian faith. However, many are unaware of the fundamental problem, which maintains existing power structures and is often publicly reproduced in the end.

Poor people in the global South do not exist so that we can learn to be grateful for our surplus. They exist because of our surplus. Our surplus would not exist at all if it had not been created at the expense of those we now want to help. Most people are aware of this problem, and it is quite understandable why we want to give something back for this very reason. We should not stop donating, but we should critically examine our attitudes and our statements and publications in this regard under the postcolonial microscope.

We believe – consciously and unconsciously – that our education and training give us the right and the legitimacy to save and educate other people. It is, in principle, an overestimation of one's own role, rooted in a colonial worldview that still sees European societies at the forefront of world development today – the others should catch up with us.

This is most evident in the example of volunteer programs. After school, (mostly multiply privileged) young people want to go abroad for a year. They apply to us at the United Evangelical Mission, among others. In their letters of motivation, we often read that they want to help above all. How do young people like this come up with the idea that they can help and save in the Global South without any professional qualifications? Do they really believe that people need their help?

I myself was one of those volunteers who 20 years ago wanted to change the world and went to Tanzania with my high school diploma in my pocket to save It was the most impressive and challenging experience of my life, and it didn't take long before I realized that I needed help and couldn't save anyone. My completely Eurocentric view of the world was turned upside down, but luckily I was supported and guided through it in UEM seminars and reflection sessions. As a young person, I needed this realization in order to see the world through different eyes to this day. For this reason, the UEM reflects on all this with its volunteers and also has a volunteer program that is equally available to young people from Africa, Asia and Germany. The internationalization of the volunteer program makes it clear through its structure that it is not the Germans who are helping the others, but young people learning from each other.

However, there are also volunteer programs that pursue different goals and take different attitudes. They have discovered white Saviorism as a sales concept. Young people with multiple privileges pay money to organizations to be allowed to help. In this way, young people without training can, for example, teach in schools or stand and assist in the operating room. Behind this is the misconception that they are well enough educated, solely on the basis of their background, to be able to help in a hospital, school or other setting, and then present themselves as white saviors digitally or analogously back home

All of this not only reproduces colonial thinking and power structures over and over again, but can also have devastating effects on local people. For example, the American volunteer Renee Bach, who had just graduated from high school, ran a Christian center for malnourished children in Uganda for years without being trained herself or hiring professionally qualified staff. Over a hundred children died at the center before the Ugandan government closed it in 2015. In 2020, Renee Bach paid damages to the mothers of two of these chil-

dren, Twalali Kifabi and Elijah Kabagambe. In October 2023, another child, Masai Yosam, died as a result of Renee Bach's unqualified 'help'.

The concept of white saviorism is a global phenomenon and the roles are also distributed in the global south. There are entire local organizations that are geared towards being the perfect places for white saviors. In 2016, I was in Tanzania with a group of German students and we visited a school in the north of the country. There were children who were made available to us for selfies like objects. There was the perfect backdrop with Kilimanjaro in the background to take "authentic" pictures. And there were extra toys that the children were given and with which they played quickly and happily, just as if they were on cue, just to get good photos. Meanwhile, we were told how dependent the school was on donations and how well this type of fundraising worked. It was dramatic to see how these children were trained to smile or even look sad – depending on the needs of the photographers. Who would do that in a German daycare center? The roles in the colonial white savior system have been internalized by all sides, and the capitalist business is running. This makes it all the more difficult to counteract something when even the people in the Global South seem to agree with it. However, the financial dependencies are easily overlooked. There is a lack of insight that people can neither meet at eye level nor be honest with themselves and each other due to the dependency structures

Even people in Germany who are sensitized to racism find it difficult not to fall into the trap of these structures when they suddenly find themselves in the middle of them. On an educational trip to South Africa on the topic of criticizing racism, I wanted to visit an orphanage with the participants. We had discussed beforehand that we did not want to behave like white saviors. As soon as we arrived and saw a room full of small Black sleeping babies, we whipped out our cameras. The flash in the dark room woke the children and chaos ensued. At that moment, it almost seemed like a reflex to the participants when they reached for the camera. When I later addressed

this violation with them, the scandal of my criticism seemed greater than the fact that they had not followed the agreed rules. It became clear to me how deeply ingrained the white savior complex is in white European people.

That is precisely why we should think carefully about how we actively protect ourselves from falling back into these old colonial thought patterns. The historically rooted and complex issue of white dominance and supremacy should not be ignored in any fundraising or aid campaign. If we long for equality, we cannot create it with a power axis that we maintain when we help and rescue in a Eurocentric sense Perhaps indigenous concepts of connectedness, as expressed in the quote from the Aboriginal activist group from Queensland, will help us: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is connected to mine, then let us work together."

➥ Two insights are important to me:
1. As 'white saviors', we take ourselves much too seriously and overlook the resources that other people bring with them.
2. The idea that mission always belongs in organized churches and mission organizations blinds us to the work of the Holy Spirit outside our own structures.

Therefore, here is a second example of unplanned and uncontrolled mission

Millions of people from the Philippines work overseas as domestic workers, caregivers, construction workers or ship crews. They do this because they cannot find sufficiently paid work in their own country. Their earnings overseas are significantly higher, but they often pay for this financial im-

provement with extremely exploitative working conditions and years of separation from their families. In short, the migration of poor people in search of work is not a desirable development.

But God's Spirit also uses problematic conditions. It entrusts the mission to people whom mission organizations would probably not send out first because they do not have sufficient education. Filipino nannies tell their charges about Jesus, and Filipino construction workers start churches where they evangelize their Nepalese and Sri Lankan colleagues. Most of this happens in an unorganized way, without financial or logistical support from any missionary organization.

So: Mission is happening! It happens in many places and at all times simply through the words and actions of Christians who do not at all feel like missionaries. It happens in conversations with the neighbor, in small acts of neighborly help, in everyday, unspectacular ways. Every Christian is a missionary – this is not an invitation to constantly preach in an intrusive way, but rather the realization that everyone who follows Jesus and lives in his love is automatically a witness to the gospel.

And we can trust the power of the Holy Spirit to build the church of Jesus Christ out of these small encounters, out of everyday kindness, out of theologically awkward testimonies and out of weird Bible interpretations.

Mission organizations with new structures – the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) as an example

Despite all my love for uncontrolled and unplanned missions, I do not want to say that mission organizations are no longer needed After all, I have spent my entire working life at the UEM. But I believe that it is more than overdue to think about

how mission organizations are actually structured. Who has the power in these organizations? Who controls the finances and decides on the programs? And is it right for mission organizations to be led by white people from the north who call the churches in the south partner churches, but ultimately give them little say?

In the UEM, it has been recognized since the mid-1980s that mission goes not only from North to South, but also from South to North – and from South to South! But if mission goes from everywhere to everywhere, then this must also be reflected in the power and financial structures

And so, in 1986, the UEM officially began a process it called "United in Mission". After ten years of deliberations, it was practically re-established in 1996: as a "community of churches on three continents" that support each other in their mission

In concrete terms, this means that each church has a number of delegates at the UEM General Assembly that corresponds to its respective size. Because the UEM has only six German member churches, but 32 African and Asian member churches, it is clear that the delegates from the churches of the Global South always have a majority This is also reflected in the governing bodies: the Supervisory Board has four delegates each from Africa, Asia and Germany (in addition to the moderator and a youth delegate). The General Assembly and the Supervisory Board decide on the overall budget and the fundamental direction of the UEM.

The majority of financial contributions to the UEM still come from the global north. But churches in the global south are increasingly taking on more responsibility: their membership fees are growing significantly from year to year; individual churches finance, for example, accommodation and

meals for international UEM programs; and the fundraising campaign under the slogan “United in Action” brings in hundreds of thousands of euros in Asia and Africa every year. Not all people and congregations in the global south are poor For example, the Lutheran Kimara congregation in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania collects donations every Sunday (!) that amount to well over 10,000 Euros. Last year, this congregation provided the UEM with 70,000 euros for scholarships.

The UEM model is radical, and it takes time for the changed structures to also change thinking and expectations. Many *white* congregations in the UEM context still see themselves first and foremost as givers; and many people in the churches in Africa and Asia think that their problems can only be solved with white help. But we are working together to change that.

And I see, for example, how churches from the global South put issues on the agenda that would not have occurred to us Germans. For example, my department, Evangelism, organized and accompanied an intensive study process on the topic of “deliverance ministry” over several years. For German churches, this is strange and unimportant, but for many churches in Africa and Asia it is a burning issue. In organizations and agencies dominated by the global North, this topic is not addressed because church leaders from the South are afraid of not being taken seriously. But in the UEM it was possible, and the General Assembly decided to work on this topic. The UEM process helped churches in Africa and Asia to develop theologically, pastorally and medically responsible practices for exorcism and to train people in their communities to do so.

No more theological hegemony of the West

by Harvey Kwiyani (Liverpool, Great Britain)

As early as 1974, Kenyan theologian John Mbiti wrote that "the church preaches universality but is theologically still provincial" Later, in 1991, the British missiologist Andrew Walls lamented that "the domination of the pale-faces (his words, not mine) remains untouched even in a world in which the number of non-Western Christians far exceeds that of Westerners" In 2002, he added that "it is incongruous that a predominantly non-Western church is still under Western theological leadership".

What does it mean theologically that Christianity in the West is in a steep downward trend and the vast majority of Christians now live outside the West?

I see the problems in four areas: (1) The West still claims to know everything best (2) The West still perceives itself as the center of the world. (3) Theology from the Global South is only perceived as exotic raw material for people in the North. (4) Between the West and the rest of the world, there is only a "dialogue of the deaf".

But there is a way around all this – a conscious cross-cultural theological dialogue between Christians of different cultural backgrounds. Such conversations give us a better understanding of God – the mosaic of the image of God gets a few more colors with each conversation. Of course, we see God better together. If we allow ourselves to be shaped or informed by a particular form of theology in today's world, we risk being theologically misinformed (even if we have read the best theologians in our traditions).

In fact, the great theologians of our time will be those who have learned to listen to the voices of "other" Christians—women, immigrants, children, Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, Europeans, and others—not to discredit and dismiss them, but to hear what God might say through their voices.

Chapter 5

Europe as a mission field

I already mentioned it in the last chapter: the missionary movement from the global South to the global North. Many migrant people who see themselves as missionaries also live and work here in Germany. It is important to listen to their voices. This has been happening far too little so far, not least because what they tell us often does not easily fit into our theological and political pigeonholes. But I invite you to be challenged to listen and then to engage in a conversation with these brothers and sisters that will allow us to learn new things together.

Europe as a field of mission and evangelization

by Elizabeth Silayo (Rheinböllen, Germany)

Introduction

Historically, it is known that the missionaries from European nations evangelised in Africa, Asia, Latin America and other parts of the world.

The great theologians and founders of the Protestant churches are Germans; Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and John Calvin, Jan Hus, just to name a few. Nowadays, in the 21st century, most of things have changed, including the ways of and views about mission; the way to be a church and to carry the messages of God should no longer viewed through the eyes of pre-colonial eras. Currently it is an epoch to apprehend European nations as a mission field. There are many challenges which face the church in Europe; for example many people are leaving the church. On the other hand, in Africa, Latin America and some parts in Asia, the church is growing in its population. Those realities are alerting us that missionaries are needed to rescuer the church in Europe. I am currently a missionary in Germany and this chapter will primarily centre on this context.

Church in Germany

People who visit Germany, which is the motherland of the Reformation, often expect a country which many people are still present and active in the church and especially in Sunday services. The church is deemed to be alive and powerful by the quantity of those who are present in Sunday services, the doctrine it offers and its activeness to diaconal services. To my surprise, the current situation in Germany is different and many people are leaving the church. For example, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) reported that in 2022, a total of 745,000 members left the church, which is the highest figure on record. From that number 380,000 members apparently chose to leave the church, an increase of almost 36 percent over the previous year, while the other 365,000 members died. At the same year, the church received a total of 170,000 new members. Nowadays, just very few old people visit Sunday services, and a good number of churches are closed for lack of members. The number of pastors is also rapidly dropping.

Form the above alarming highlights, it is easier to understand my focus that Germany is a mission field. The mainstream Protestants

in German are no longer characterized by a Lutheran legacy but by diversity and a great variety of opinions, positions, and convictions. It is hard to spell clearly and exactly where the Germany church stands. Some of those Christians who endeavour to hold on to the faith in God have a hard time coping with the reality of a widespread atmosphere of tolerance and indifference toward dogma and confession. Christians are no longer concerned about sin and forgiveness, which is the great reason of the work of the cross of Calvary. Nowadays to be a Christian in Germany doesn't necessarily mean to be concerned about your eternal salvation. Christianity is much more concerned about social political issues and campaigns and the message of Gospel is often compromised.

Missionary opportunities and possibilities in Germany

The church in Europe needs social spiritual missionaries. The present situation in the church and community is a visible call for support. This fact goes hand in hand with the reality in which the global communities are living. There are burning summers, intense forest fires, extended droughts, disturbing storms, floods, melting glaciers, ocean acidification, unprecedented forest depletion, and many different kind of wars. Hunger and water scarcity are increasing, and impoverished and vulnerable communities are suffering more and more.

In all these challenges that the world is currently facing, there are also opportunities that come out of the moment. Many people are migrating around the world seeking refuge. Germany, as many other nations, is receiving a large number of migrants. This reality should not so much be seen as an alarming challenge of multicultural communities, but it rather offers an opportunity for the churches to incorporate with other cultures in a pragmatic sense; it is an open chance for churches in German to practice being an intercultural church. This is because many cultures are present in the German community, but still only a very small number of migrants is active

in the German church. The church in Germany should learn to be a role model of being an inviting church as it is stated in the Gospel of Matthew 11:28.

Refugees as an open door for Missio Dei in the community

The first and important thing which most of us could think of as the refugees arrived in their host countries is their empty hands and how they are in need. Seeking what the refugee needs and wants is a great humanitarian action. However, as a matter of fact, the church, and especially here in Germany, is forgetting to properly use the spiritual gifts which most refugees brought with them. I am convinced that there are seen and unseen spiritual symbols which refugees brought with them, and they lack being nurtured by the host church. When the church is open and flexible to receive those spiritual gifts which are freely brought to them, it will grow richly in multicultural and diverse manners.

The best approach to for the church to integrate is to learn and adopt the Missio Dei doctrine which will offer a safer space for all migrants through sharing and growing together, and to give birth to an intercultural church.

The Missio Dei approach to mission is one of the timely doctrines which I consider best for use in multicultural contexts. God has a purposeful mission in the world which includes redemption, reconciliation and restoration. The mission of God can force the church to set its goal to actively work toward opening more doors for non-native Germans to participate in the church and make it more diverse. The Missio Dei in the German context should focus on the Trinitarian basis (sharing basis) of every aspect of church life. I am convinced that the main goal of the Missio Dei is to restore humans to live in relationship with one another and God. The German church may use refugees as a chance to grow in interculturality, and to repent from maintaining a White church in a multicultural community.

Practising mission in Germany

The common ground of mission, as a shared basis, has to focus on a unified and homogenous room where mission has to pass to people with their different religion and cultural background realities. In that view, the ground should make all feel welcomed. In fact, we are living in a time where specific confessions have no greater value than the ecumenical spirit. Ecumenical in its nature is multicultural, intercultural, interreligious and international. Below are some suggestions for pragmatic mission strategies which the Germans could reflect upon to open doors for the church to grow intercultural.

1. Organising common meetings among different cultures and religion groups. In those meetings it is vital to prioritize the good news from the Bible and other sacred books, prayers, and intercessions, among other activities. This is an opportunity for people to meet, exchange and grow together.
2. To write ecumenical documents which emphasize a Trinitarian basis (sharing basis) for mission and use them as a methodical tool for developing an intercultural and interreligious mission in the local churches. However, I acknowledge there are numbers of documents which are already written. Nevertheless, I insist to engage migrants to place their pens into further ecumenical documents in order to have a sense of multiculturality.
3. To offer more dialogical rooms in the church. Dialogue is the way which international and multicultural communities could bring their experiences and expertise to the German church. This is possible through including non-German people in the church system where most of the decisions are made.
4. To minimise the language barriers by using audio and text translations in the churches' services and meetings. Language interpretation will remove bias for those who have German language barriers.

5. To review the quality of theological education to see if it is still compatible with the church work. Conceivably, necessary amendments have to be made.

Final reflections

In concluding this chapter it is clear that, in order to allow Europe to be a mission field, the church in Europe should focus on internationalisation and interculturalisation. The church in Europe has to make efforts toward embracing and celebrating diversity, and fostering a climate where various cultures congregate in unity within the church. The evolving dynamics of the modern world stress the importance of transcending cultural barriers and embracing a more inclusive approach to missionary work. Europe, with its diversity of cultures and traditions, presents an opportune moment for the church to engage in cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Therefore, the call to action lies in nurturing an environment that promotes intercultural exchange, where individuals from varying backgrounds find a welcoming and understanding space within the church. This not only enriches the spiritual fabric of the community but also enables the church to effectively address the evolving spiritual needs in this region. In principle, the future of missionary endeavours in Europe lies upon the ability to embrace diversity, nurture cross-cultural connections, and integrate these values as key of an ecclesiastical practice.

↪ Elizabeth Silayo is a Tanzanian pastor who now works in the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland. She thinks in terms of theological papers and church structures, as is common for us. The approach of the charismatic Richard Aidoo, who originally comes from Ghana, is quite different:

“I love Germany and the Germans”

by Richard Aidoo (Düsseldorf, Germany)

The Beginning: How I became a missionary in Germany

About 35 years ago, when I was still living in Ghana, I took time to pray every day early in the morning. One morning I heard a voice saying, “Go to Germany.” The next day I went to the embassy and asked what it takes to go to Germany. I was told that I needed a passport and a valid ticket. I got them and went back to the embassy, where they asked me: When will you travel?

Actually, I wasn’t even sure about the whole thing, whether this was really a calling from God. So I had to fill out this long questionnaire, and there were some questions that I couldn’t answer, so I just left them out. To my surprise, they gave me a missionary visa! I hadn’t expected that.

To cut a long story short, I landed in Düsseldorf and met Pastor Gerhard Gericke, who was the superintendent of the Protestant Church in the city at the time. He helped me with my visa and accommodation. He helped me with everything I needed and also with starting my congregation. There was already a congregation for foreigners, but they needed someone to lead them. So I came at the right time, like a missing piece of the puzzle. My mission has always been closely linked to the Protestant Church, and we still have a good relationship today.

My church: New Life Church Düsseldorf

Today, our church has over 55 nations under one roof. Every Sunday, we celebrate six services: in French-German, German, English, Farsi-German, English-German and Spanish-German. This year, we are planning to start an Arabic community. We have an Arabic Christian among us who wants to establish an Arabic mission in our church. My wife is from Chile and leads the Latino community.

It is amazing to see how nations come together in harmony and speak one language – which means that we all have Jesus Christ in common. Even people who don't know Jesus feel at home here. We have had Muslims come for six to eight months just for the community before becoming Christians. They told me that they liked the atmosphere, the way we interacted, and so they brought their whole family and became a part of us. We have a pastor who is a former Muslim, our caretaker is a former Muslim – we have many members who were originally Muslims.

Our location is in Düsseldorf-Flingern, in the middle of a multicultural neighborhood. This fits very well with the vision of our church.

Our building was originally a Catholic church, St. Vincent, which had been closed for five years. We saw in the newspaper that the diocese wanted to get rid of this church and the adjoining parish hall. We applied immediately, and they gave us these buildings! That was more than 20 years ago.

In the beginning, we paid a symbolic rent of one German mark per year. Over the years, we have grown. After about 5 years of this symbolic 1-DM contract, we started paying for maintenance and were also able to afford a higher rent. After another five years, the diocese told us they wanted to sell the buildings. God helped us and we were able to buy them. Now they belong to us. It is a large church and a large parish hall. Nevertheless, the buildings are now too small for our many activities.

How I, as a Ghanaian pastor, am building an international church in Germany

My calling is to be an evangelist, but I have the heart of a pastor. I love people, I enjoy being around people, so it's easy for me to make friends. An evangelist has to go out and meet people, but God has turned it around for me. People just come to my church.

The church is very international, but there are also many Germans. This is where culture comes into play. I am Ghanaian; that is my culture, I speak the languages. That's why it is very easy for me to com-

municate with Ghanaians or other West Africans. I know what they like to eat, I know the songs they like to sing, it would be very easy. But the vision God has given me is to take Christ to the nations. So I don't want to limit myself to the people of my country.

When God brought me to Germany, I wanted to bless the Germans. The Germans should benefit from the fact that God brought me here. So I studied the culture. But that doesn't mean you have to know the language very well. I never took a formal German course. I don't speak German very well either, but I have spent a lot of time with Germans – and many of them speak good English. This encouraged me not to go to a language school, but rather to spend a lot of time with Germans.

For example, when former German President Christian Wulff came to Düsseldorf, the mayor selected fifty influential citizens of the city for a reception. I was invited too! And Wulff spoke to me at City Hall; I tried to do it in German, but he answered in English, so we spoke in English. I felt like he was embracing the international community: at this event, I represented the Baptist Church, but at the same time, I represented so many other organizations that were not invited.

What I mean to say is this: I have studied German culture. I love the Germans, I pray for Germany every day. I make a point of praying for Germany for five minutes every day because I love this country so much. I have prayed for revival, for the government of the country, for the churches, for the young people – I have prayed so much for Germany!

And that's why I have created an atmosphere in the church where Germans feel very comfortable when they come in. For example, we don't sing songs from my country and in our languages. We are in Germany, after all! So we sing German and English songs that Germans like. They need to feel like they belong. That's why we now have many German members and also Germans in the leadership of the congregation. We have quite a few older people – the oldest of whom is 93 years old – but mostly young people. My sons and their friends are always around and they bring many people with them.

I also think it is important that we are hospitable. I tell those who have been in the community for a long time: don't take the parking spaces next to the church, but leave them for the newcomers! Every Sunday, make sure you interact with someone you don't know yet, who is new to the church! Make people feel at home, really have fellowship with them!

Of course, in the beginning, West African members of the church also complained that it was too German. As a pastor, you always get a lot of criticism, and if you don't hear from God, if you're not sure of your calling, then you become insecure and lose your vision. But I have a goal, a vision. I know which direction I'm going. So when someone gives me their opinion, I respectfully listen to them and explain that we are in this country, that God has brought us here, that we are here and that we will stay. So why not embrace their culture? Why not be part of them?

Many of the Ghanaians have now understood this. In the beginning, it was uncomfortable for them, but now they like the international atmosphere.

Hope for Germany

There is so much hope for Germany. This country has done so much for the world! Germany is spiritually known because of Martin Luther, because of the Reformation. Germany has influenced the body of Christ in a very positive way, for example through Zinzendorf. There are so many missionaries who have blessed the world.

And the young people here are so hungry for God. They talk about spiritual issues. They want to get to know the Bible. If you want to know what the future of a nation looks like, look at the young people. And I see a kind of revival, not on a large scale, but in the hearts of the people.

And as for the growing hostility towards immigrants in Germany: Our message to everyone who comes to our church is John 13:34f: "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Just as I have

loved you, you also should love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." This is the message I proclaim. Love God, love one another! This message can change a nation, it can change a community, a situation in which no one sees hope. Musicians sing about love. Every musician who deals intensively with the subject of love will be very successful. Every politician who talks about integration will be great. Love is the key. That is the message, the Gospel is about love. That is why Christ died on the cross. It is all about love.

I know that all churches have their own problems, power struggles and the like. We also have friction from time to time, but in the many years that our church has existed, there have never been any major conflicts or divisions. This is because we have this message of love. That is the message of Jesus.

That is what I tell the community. Love each other, love the Germans, love the people! You don't love people because you want something from them, you just love them unconditionally. Be tolerant, be accepting! We belong together. No one is an island, you need me, I need you, we need each other. That is the message of Jesus Christ.

I tell my community that there are very good people and very bad people in every country. Racism exists in Africa, too. It is everywhere. Much worse things have happened in Ghana and Nigeria. So I tell my community: never see a German in a bad light, always see the Germans as a great blessing. Do you see what Chancellor Angela Merkel did when all those refugees were stranded? When everyone else closed their doors, Germany opened them out of humanity. Would you call a country like that a bad country? No, there is no reason to.

What German churches can learn from migrant churches

The Germans can learn from us migrant pastors and Christians that we are brave. We can just open our mouths and talk to anyone, no matter who. We are brave on the train. We are not shy, we just talk. I

also tell my community this: don't stay quiet when you are on the train. Talk to the Germans! And they ask me: how do you talk to people who don't want to talk to you? And I answer: talk about the weather! "Oh, what a nice day!" As soon as you start talking about something like that, people will smile and make contact with you. "Oh, it's so cold!" Just start talking about the weather!

So the Germans can learn from us to take the initiative. We talk to people, we do the work of evangelists with enthusiasm. We can sing on the street and preach on the street. The Germans respect everyone's personal space: this is my space, this is your space, I will not bother you. But the migrant churches can invade your space. Of course, this can also be received negatively. But we can do it in a positive way, by bringing the gospel, by telling people that God loves them, that God has not forgotten them, that there is a God and his glory fills the earth.

The Germans in my community are learning this boldness from the immigrants, and they are talking about their faith at school, in the neighborhood, and at work. In my neighborhood, too, everyone knows that I am a pastor because I share the Gospel with them.

A word of advice to German churches and Christians

Don't be afraid of the migrant churches! They have something that the German churches can benefit from. The migrant churches will not make the German churches what they are – and please don't make migrant churches what you are! We learn from each other. We all fit into this puzzle. Or like a piano: it has black and white keys, and only when they come together do you have a beautiful melody. Can you imagine a piano with only white keys? Or only black keys? When black and white come together, we have a beautiful melody. So please, German churches, don't be afraid to embrace the migrant churches. Where there is peace, there is no mistrust. Where there is peace, there is love. Everything will be fine, so don't be afraid. Embrace us!

"The revival of European Christianity is Black and Pentecostal."

by Harvey Kwiyani (Liverpool, Great Britain)

Walter Hollenweger suggested in 1992 that "British Christians prayed for a revival. When it came, they did not recognise it because it was black."

I wonder what this statement means to our theology (and theological education) as well as to our missiology today, 30 years after it was published. Of course, there are many more black Christians in the UK today than in the 1980s and 90s. Yet, for many of us, Hollenweger's statement still stands true even though this black revival, invisible and excluded as it may be, has been here for decades.

Generally speaking, many Black Majority Church exist in silos and have very little to do with their non-black neighbours. More often than not, their neighbours have little to do with them as well. There are many reasons for this. One of the main concerns I have heard numerous times is that African Christians are (loud-praying and prosperity-preaching) Pentecostals and they are, therefore, "too different from us." My African friends say something similar, "We do not trust their [British Christian's] Spirit-deprived Christianity and its theology." A bishop told me not too long ago, "We can never allow our young men and women to study theology in Western institutions. They gain a lot of knowledge but lose the Spirit in the process." We are divided not only by the colours of our skin but also by our theologies.

Hollenweger's statement in 2023 should read, " ...they did not recognise it because it was black and Pentecostal." This lack of theological cross-cultural conversations starves us all. The Christian faith is better when it reflects our unity in diversity in God. We all see God better through the eyes of our neighbours. At risk here is the very theological hybridity that makes it possible for us to learn about God from one another — what if, indeed, the migrant can be a theologian?

Western Christians have a lot to learn from African Pentecostals just as much as African Pentecostals must learn from Western Christians. No community has a monopoly on theology. We all have blind spots, and this is by design. As such, the lack of diversity among teaching staff in our theological institutions should concern us all.

➥ Three migrant theologians have so far described in this chapter how they understand their mission in Europe. Now let's change the perspective: What actually happens in 'classic' German church congregations when migrants join them?

The "strangers" among us have made us more missionary

by Frank Krämer (Zwickau, Germany)

I am a parish worker in the Luther parish in Zwickau. I am responsible for all cross-sectional tasks in the parish: preaching, working with foreign brothers and sisters, organizational matters, small group work and the everyday things that come up.

The Luther parish is part of the Zwickau North church circuit. In 2011, it started out as a model parish within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony. The idea was to use church planting to bring new life into a dying community and to dare to do something new. Now, twelve years later, the community has grown from about 15 visitors at church services and no children to about 170 churchgoers and many children of all ages – the model has worked. The model project was based on a concept and jointly developed guidelines that are still in place today. The approach to church development was designed for participation, low-threshold access and mission, accompanied by a clear Biblical message, pastoral care and modern forms of music.

In 2012, before the big influx of refugees, something happened that at first seemed like a coincidence: an Iranian woman was looking for a church. She was standing in front of a church building that was closed because there was no service that Sunday. A couple from the Luther parish had seen her driving by on their way to worship, approached her and invited her to our service. A lot has developed from that: the next Sunday, the young woman from Iran brought her brother with her and within a short time many more people came through these two. With the low-threshold and missionary approach, the pastor of the community and some community members then offered an international Bible study in Persian, English and German which more and more people attended. With the first major wave of refugees in 2015, we practically became the main point of contact for every Persian-speaking refugee in the Zwickau area who needed help. These included Persians, Syrians and people from other countries who were Christians, but also many people who wanted to get to know the Christian faith through Bible study and in church services.

They were people who were somehow interested in Christianity, and who had fled for a variety of reasons. Some of them had already had an impression of or an encounter with Christianity. We took these people in as best we could. Of course, you have to differentiate, because a congregation is not a homogenous mass. For some people in our parish, it has become a matter close to their hearts; they devote a lot of time and energy to ensuring that the refugees are doing well. And then there are others who accept it, support it, but are not active themselves.

This has led to a situation where in some years we have baptized 40 or 50 people in one service – one baptism after the other! Of course, this has further changed our church structure. We have noticed that these people need special spiritual and social care. Now, after a few years, we have developed a certain routine. We know that for people from the Persian/Kurdish/Arabic region, the service alone is not enough; they

also need their own program during the week. They also need social counseling and support; that's why we have a full-time staff member for church refugee work. And we have opened a clothing store on behalf of the city of Zwickau in order to offer concrete everyday help.

Since then, our parish has become a point of contact for people from other countries, although many people also move on – and others arrive. About 60 people from this cultural background have remained with us. This has changed our parish in many ways. We ask ourselves with everything we plan: What does the brother and sister with a migration background get out of this offer? Where do we need translation? Where do we perhaps need extra offers? We have always thought about this when we developed concepts for new activities. We think for these people, but we have also quickly ensured that there is always a representative of the migrants in the parish leadership so that their interests are taken into account.

We have also realized that we are not alone in the world and that our culture cannot automatically be associated with being a Christian. It is interesting that someone from a different country understands the Bible quite differently than I do and that they react quite differently to it than I do – and that is not wrong, just different! This experience has made us more culturally sensitive.

We have also learned that you need a heart for people if you want to reach them. Words alone are not enough. If you turn to someone and take them seriously, a lot is possible. The fact that these people have come to us has strengthened our missional character as a local church. As a result, we have become more missionary as a local church in Zwickau. Consequently, we have built up local community work supported by the city government and the European Union, as well as evangelistic programs with families. We have increasingly moved from being a church that people come to, to one that goes to people. We have learned to respond sensitively to people from different social classes and countries of origin. "Becoming a local from

the area around the train station for the locals from the area around the train station" characterizes our church culture.

We have been able to learn a great deal in recent years:

There are people from the Persian-speaking world who come to us, are interested in the Christian faith, we simply tell them about it, and they implement it in a straightforward and consistent way. The Persians who have come to faith are a role model for us. They live their Christianity so clearly and unreservedly because following Jesus determines their whole life. They simply do it! They are a challenge to us and an encouragement to follow their example, to follow Christ with the same consistency, and not to limit the life of faith to two hours on Sunday.

Working with immigrants makes us more missionary because we have learned to put ourselves in other people's shoes, to respond to people who come to us and to offer everyone what they need. We want to meet everyone in the right way and give them access to faith. To do that, we need to get to know people and understand how they live and how they see the world.

Our church offers people from the Persian/Arabic/Kurdish region their own events. Here they can ask their own questions and discuss their problems. These arise because they are new to our faith and new to our culture. We try to take into account in these groups what these people think, feel and believe, and want to offer them support there.

We are challenged by their questions to re-think our own faith. A current example: the question arose as to whether one can actually pray for the dead or not, whether it has an effect or not. In particular, whether one can pray for people in their homeland, from the family, who never got to know Jesus. Who died in a different faith, because they were forced or out of habit. And it's not just about theological questions, but also about feelings, and about the question: what is justice? And what is the justice of God?

In any case, people ask about the justice of God again and again. Specifically, they ask about theodicy: How can God actually allow so much suffering? This suffering is not theoretical, they have experienced it themselves! They also have trinitarian questions based on their previous religious background. We talk about whether Jesus was a prophet or the Son of God, and what difference that makes. We also talk about the apparent similarities between the Old Testament and Islam: there is Abraham/Ibrahim, Joseph/Yussuf, Ishmael – what does that mean, how can these things be classified? I then always try to present the Biblical testimony, allowing as little of my own cultural identity to flow into it as possible … as far as I can manage that!

We ask why people come to Christian communities and, in particular, what motivates people from other countries to come to us. Some say, "I have a dream!" Others say that they were in a hidden house church in Iran. Still others say, "A friend told me that you exist." Some come because they have heard that they can get help here. And then there are many who simply bring people from their environment with them because they like it here and think that this is a good place for them.

From this we learn to listen, to observe and to recognize how we can become even more welcoming as a community.

For example, there is a Kurdish couple from Mahabad. They came to Germany as political refugees because they were politically active in their home country. They now want to be baptized in our church and have had 10 weeks of baptismal instruction for this. They are a good example of how drastically people change when they consistently follow Jesus. They are absolutely clear in their Christian testimony. They study the Bible intensively. They pray a lot, out loud, in public. They contribute to the group with comments that are full of uncommon wisdom. They are clearly in line with the Biblical testimony. You could also say that they are full of the Holy Spirit. And you can feel that, and so can others!

We have learned to respect people regardless of their origin. Anyone who dares to make contact with our migrants and have a conversation with them is surprised. We live in Saxony, in a region and in a time when resentment against foreigners is growing. That is unfortunate and difficult, but these are the times in which we live. And this also exists, more or less hidden, in Christian communities and in our community as well. We are not a community of special saints, but we consist more or less of a cross-cut of society, and there are all kinds of opinions. But we experience: When people meet, when they work together in a team, they realize that the others are quite normal people and nice persons after all.

Then there are people in our community whose hearts have been opened. They regularly invite immigrants, have many private contacts. They invite them to family celebrations, to Christmas and Easter, and try to integrate them into the world of work. They use their personal and business networks to give these people prospects, because not everything is going well in the communities and government offices. Not everyone gets a German course immediately, not everyone is integrated equally, and those who were already disadvantaged in their home countries experience the same level of disadvantage in Germany. So there are people in our community who are very active in voluntary work. And there is everything in between.

The presence of foreigners in our community puts my own faith to the test. Because people ask why I believe something, why things should be that way. That means I have to provide answers myself and figure out why I believe this or that. As a result, I probably have a more reflected faith than I did 10 or 15 years ago. It also happens here in the community that the newcomers ask someone: Yes, if you are a Christian, why do you live this way? Where our German culture has blurred our Christian faith, there are questions from those whose faith is fresh and new, who feel that words and deeds do not fit. This happens, for example, when it comes to keeping the Ten Command-

ments, to sanctify Sunday as the Lord's Day; when it comes to: love your neighbor as yourself.

If I were to summarize my experiences, I would say: The idea of Missio Dei, the mission of God, stands above all this. We are included in God's plan and must be his extended arm to the maximum. But God is the one who does the mission and who uses us to do it. That must be stated first and foremost.

Terms such as "worldwide mission" or "reverse mission" are actually only partially accurate, because God's work is much greater and much more individual. In our studies, we racked our brains over how to do mission work in Afghanistan or Iran. Only to realize years later that these people are coming to us! Under no circumstances should we underestimate the dynamic work of God! You have to get involved, you have to become part of his movement. And many people do not come to us because we have actively evangelized them, but because God's Spirit has already prepared them. We are not asked to do more than to live our Christian faith with our heads and hearts and love, and so much can be done with that.

➥ I am writing this in January 2024, when the discussion in Germany is raging about how we should deal with the right-wing AfD party and the fact that there are now secret plans to deport immigrants.

In recent weeks, German churches have often taken a very clear position: in favor of protecting refugees, for sea rescue in the Mediterranean, against racism and, in general, "against the right". This is important and a consequence of taking the Biblical message seriously that all people are God's beloved children. And that we listen to the fact that, especially in the First Testament, the protection of immigrants in Israel is the commandment that is repeated most often – after all, Israel itself was once an economic refugee in Egypt!

But the fact that the mission of migrant people in and to Germany is so little perceived here shows that our churches, too, are still under racist influence and have not yet really freed themselves from the idea that we are the ones to whom the mission in Germany belongs. And that is why it is not enough for Christians, pastors and churches to position themselves politically, towards the outside. Rather, it is in the way we deal with migrant Christians in Germany that we prove whether we are also working to overcome our internal racism.

Overcoming racism, sexism and discrimination: a missionary project by young *white* and people of color has also taken up this cause.

Studio41 – An intersectional and transcultural youth community

by Barbara Matt and Justin Sathiskumar (Dortmund, Germany)

"Are you coming around for the service tonight? There's free pizza for everyone afterwards!" How often have we said this sentence and invited teenagers and young adults to our worship service. Inviting for pizza works! We have been having services and pizza for six years now. One time, we replaced the pizza with cocktails and ice cream after the service and that led directly to complaints about where the pizza was.

How did this come about and what do we actually do in Studio41?

Since January 2022, we have officially existed as Studio41. We are now a team of four, each employed at Studio41 for 25% of our working time, and we help shape church life with and for young people and young adults in the Nordstadt district of Dortmund (Studio41-do.de, Instagram: Studio41_do). We are an innovation project of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and the Protestant Church District of Dortmund.

Our work has emerged from the international branch of the Lydia congregation in Dortmund. In 2018, we started as a team of two volunteers to build up youth work in the Lydia Church. We dreamt of church services for young people with our finger on the pulse of time. So we started to prepare, design and celebrate them ourselves. They are still the centerpiece of our community today. Our first services were well received and the number of visitors grew quickly. We saw potential in our work. People needed us. We, as a young, volunteer team of two, were strengthened and encouraged by friends to continue and share our vision. Our work grew and in 2022 we were able to become independent. We do open youth work in the form of, for example, building a community garden together, designing our rooms, setting up a diversity-sensitive bookshelf, film nights, art projects, football, gaming, music projects, summer camps, etc. It is our shared studio 41, which we redesign together again and again. Everyone who comes is invited to get involved, to have a say and to help shape the studio. They are seen and heard. Their opinions are important and their statements are taken seriously. We learn with and from each other. This is an essential experience of agency for our target group.

Young people of color in Studio41 have requested an explicit BIPoC[5] work. In January 2023, we hired a colleague of color to develop this work. The BIPoC group meets every two weeks. It is a safer space[6] for people who have been negatively affected by racism. White people are not in our building while the BIPoC group is meeting. The group's participants cook and eat together, exchange ideas, make music, and strengthen and empower each other. This work is particularly important because it gives people who have experienced racism a space to talk about it, to network and to develop strategies together to deal with it. The work strengthens the self-confidence of the young people

5 BIPoC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

6 We talk of ‚safer' space as there is no completely safe space.

and young adults involved. As Studio41, we do almost no advertising for the BIPoC group. Nevertheless, it is constantly growing because the participants keep bringing friends, cousins or siblings with them.

Our event-style services take place four times a year. Between 60 and 120 people participate. How are our services designed? During the development process, we thought about what kind of service we would like to attend ourselves and, more importantly, what kind of service we would honestly and happily invite our friends and fellow students to. The result was a service on Saturday evenings that is designed to be varied and informal, with warm-ups for everyone, drinks, a time to visit different stations with hands-on activities, dancing, singing, theater, lots of participation, and sometimes with confetti and neon lights. Community is crucial in all our services. After the service, we invite everyone to stay for pizza. It is not uncommon for young people to come to us initially for the free pizza and the community, and only after a while for the content of the service. Based loosely on Acts 2:42, we could well speak of ourselves as the "community of pizza eating and prayer".

In 2022 and 2023, we celebrated Christmas together in Studio41 with about 30 people after our Christmas Eve service. There were families, couples, friends, flat mates and individuals. As a diverse group that had become a Christmas family, we cooked together, prepared the festive table, ate, sang, played and danced. For some, even after years in Germany, this was their first experience of Christmas together.

About half of the teenagers and young adults we reach with our work have distanced themselves from the church, be it Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, or have never had anything to do with it. They do not belong to any parish and would never think of attending a church service, especially not on Sunday morning. In addition, second-generation immigrant teenagers and young adults come to us who also attend their parents' international churches and have grown

up there as a rule. They are usually very attached to the Christian faith. What they all have in common is that they are looking for a sense of belonging and a place for themselves. Through our offers, they find a place where they can arrive. They find a place for themselves. They find Christian community and church in a new form. They find support and are personally encouraged.

We are inspired by God's love and want to pass it on through our community, our being and our actions. It is a privilege for us to be able to tell young people that they are valuable and loved. Through word and deed, we stand by our slogan: "Loved. Wanted. Blessed."

Beyond our practical work with our target group, we cooperate with three international churches that celebrate their services in our building on Sundays. Their teenagers and young adults attend our events and are particularly addressed by the BIPoC group.

Relationship building is key to our work. We know almost everyone who comes to us personally and are responsive and in touch with them primarily through digital media. They don't just come to us at Studio41, we also visit them in their communities. Spontaneity and flexibility are crucial when working with our target group and their needs. Through our relationships with each other, we learn about the numerous challenges in the reality of young people's lives. These are often psychological challenges, neglect and/or experiences of violence. It is frequently necessary to refer them to youth welfare services, counseling centers and therapy offers. Unfortunately, we do not have adequate time and resources to develop more contacts to such institutions.

For us at Studio41, it is essential to consider discrimination and to have an intersectional perspective. The vast majority of teenagers and young adults who come to us are negatively affected by classism. In addition, many suffer from racism and/or queer hostility, and some from ableism. In order to create intersectionally safer spaces, we work with an awareness concept at events whenever

possible, and we regularly educate and train ourselves as a team. We know that we are not perfect at this and we realize how difficult it is to create spaces that are as free of discrimination as possible. We fail and learn from it. As Studio41, we have committed ourselves to paying attention to and living out diversity in all our events and offers, in our (theological) content, in our public relations work and in the composition of our team.

Together, we as the Studio41 team have agreed on the following core values for our work and community:

Jesus-centered: Jesus is the center of our community. He is our beginning and our end. The verses from Ephesians 4:4-6 and 15-16 guide and lead us in who we are and what we do.

Relationship-oriented: Everyone is welcome here! You are right with us just as you are – with all your strengths and weaknesses! It is important to us to build and live authentic relationships because we care about you!

Error-friendly: We expect that we as humans make mistakes and do not claim to be perfect. The slogan of the Dortmund Nordstadt neighborhood is our motto: "Not perfect, but unique." We are a community of learners. Everyone can contribute with their gifts in complete freedom.

In touch with the times: We shape our community in the here and now – digitally and analogously, based on the needs and desires of the people we meet. We have a dynamic structure. We love to try things out and just do them. There are no limits to creativity and new ideas.

Critical of racism: We know that there is no such thing as a racism-free space. That is why we actively and regularly deal with racism and train our awareness.

Diversity-sensitive: We are located in Dortmund's Nordstadt district. People with very different histories, backgrounds and experiences live in this part of the city. Together and with great openness and

appreciation for one another, we shape our interactions and learn from each other.

We are fully funded until the end of 2024 by the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and the Evangelical Church District of Dortmund. We hope that our work can continue beyond that. In our daily work, we experience that there is a great need for our services. We would like to create more positions with a larger scope and expand our team. It is important to us to win over colleagues to pray, think and move forward together in order to build a lived, diversity-sensitive, church reality for young people. In Dortmund-Nordstadt, we at Studio41 are growing from a grounding in Christ towards Christ, making visible the diverse community of church that has already been given in Christ.

Chapter 6

Mission in a multi-faith context

Dialogue is my life

by Shukuru Maloda (Zanzibar, Tanzania)

I am the Lutheran district pastor in Zanzibar and I have lived and worked here since 2009. I was well prepared for the challenges here by doing a Master in Theology and a Master in Christian-Muslim relationships. I am happy living here, and I have become a Zanzibari over the years.

Zanzibar is a Muslim majority island. Muslims make up 97% of the population, and Christians from all denominations are only about 3%.

But Christian-Muslim interaction is not new on Zanzibar. When the Portuguese first came under Vasco da Gama, they encountered the Arab traders who have been here since the 7th century. Lutheran missionaries came in the late 19th century, but in the1890s, they turned their work over to the Anglicans because of the British-German treaty in which Heligoland and Zanzibar were exchanged.

The Lutheran Church came back to Zanzibar in the 1960s, during the struggle for independence. It came with people from the mainland, with government officials, soldiers, and business people. So the first part of our mission on Zanzibar is taking care of these people who live and work on Zanzibar. They are the church, the Lutheran church. We baptize our children, we preach and share the Gospel. Almost 99% of our congregation members come from the mainland. Some came in the 1950s, some in the 1980s, some after 2000. They have to learn what it means to be a Christian in Zanzibar. It is also not easy for most of them to access Sunday services, because they live in areas far away from churches. They are working on a farm, maybe. So our mission first of all is to take care of these Christians, to visit them where they live and where there are no churches or worshipping centers. So we have to meet them in their places of work, on the farm, in some hostel, some remote hotels. They need a word of prayer, counseling. We are now also opening new churches in such remote places. So we are planting churches, but we also take care of individual Christians living in Zanzibar.

The second part of our mission is reaching out to Muslims. We want to share the love of Christ with the Muslims. But they have closed their doors. And we cannot knock at their doors and start preaching the Gospel. So we needed to develop something to develop friendships, just meeting each other, and so the idea of the Christian Muslim Center came up. We as the minority initiated the center. We started with the religious leaders, introducing ourselves, how are we going to work together, finding a common agenda. Through this kind of round table talks, then friendship, we developed brother- and sisterhood. We started asking questions of each other, like the Muslims were asking us: You Christians, what are you believing? What are you doing? What is your mission here? What is the church's role in the community? So we told them about our community development projects, we told them about our counseling and so on. We said that we have

a lot of activities, we are not just coming to baptize people, no. As a member of the committee of religious leaders, I have experienced a lot of such questions from the colleagues, when we come together and talk and share.

Finally, we told each other that in Islam there is da'wa, which means they invite people to Islam, and in Christianity there is mission, we invite people to Christ. And there is no way that we stop this, so how are we going to do it? So we started sharing about taboos. So the Muslims told us: We know that you like to go out and preach. But please respect Ramadan. Ramadan is a holy month for us, so it is a sensitive time. Let us observe it, once it is done, we can meet, you can preach, but during Ramadan is not the right time to do things together. Of course, they invite us for Iftar, now they know that they can invite Christians! We also invite them for Christmas and Easter. They are allowed to come! So we exchange invitations. So our members see their leaders together, and this changes their thinking, their perspective, their way of looking at Christian-Muslim relations. So people open up, and so we have a chance to share the love of Christ.

For example, we had a chance to discuss the understanding of peace in Christian understanding and peace in Islamic understanding. This is a way of sharing the Gospel, because we speak of the peace in Christ. We also talk about family planning, how it is seen in our respective faiths, and this also is a chance to share the Gospel. Or we talk about vaccination: During the COVID pandemic we shared a lot about vaccination, because people were so hesitant. So the government asked our joint committee of religious leaders: Please go out and say something, publicly, on social media. So for me, this interfaith dialogue, this roundtable of different religious leaders, it gives us a chance to tell the Muslim community about the Gospel. So the agenda is the good news, and we can take any topic and reference it to the Bible, and this is a chance to preach the Gospel.

We have even discussed about jeans! And we have talked about casting out demons. So the Muslims hear that we have these kinds of prayer. And they ask: Is it possible for a Muslim to come and be prayed for? Even if that person is not baptized? And we say yes, and they just come, looking for a prayer because they have been troubled with bad jinns. This is how we do our outreach, our mission among Muslims.

We also prepare our members for what we call "life dialogue" – you may not say anything, but show them love, love your neighbor, don't hide yourself inside. Go out to them when they are in trouble and when they are happy. So we have such seminars for our church members to equip them how to live with Muslims and share the Gospel by living, by interacting as a human being, as a community member, sometimes even without talking. Don't hide. It is easy to preach through our lifestyles – the way you cooperate with your neighbors, interact, the way you share, it is a good way to tell them that Christianity is something good. When it comes to any kind of evangelism, it is easier for us if people already have an understanding of the beauty of Christianity.

Of course, there are ups and downs. There are moments of misunderstandings, and then there is external pressure and influence from both sides. We Christians have the global body of Christ, and there is influence from these brothers and sisters. The Muslims also have their relationship to Oman. So there is internal and external influence, pressure on how we live together, how we navigate in our faith, how we do Islamic da'wa and Christian mission.

In a sense, it is more difficult with people coming in from the outside, and easier as long as we are among Zanzibaris, among ourselves. We have those extremists or radicals (that is what I call them) who think we don't do mission, coming in from the outside, saying "You have been there for so long, how many Muslims have you converted? Why don't you do open air meetings?" Or these people come themselves and do door-to-door evangelism and then they run into

trouble; and sometimes they just set a fire and then take the next ferry back, leaving us with the consequences. Because they don't know the context, they don't know the taboos, the cultural taboos and the respects, how we live together here. So this is the pressure that causes difficulties when not taken good care of.

We also have radical Muslim preachers coming in; or Zanzibaris who have studied abroad and come back and have a completely different way of doing da'wa. They also tend to light fires. And then some people follow them and say that Zanzibar should be an Islamic region if thought we are part of secular Tanzania. So these are the kinds of confrontations that bring us into misunderstanding or chaos. So really it is coming from the outside.

Sometimes they also send video clips which say that Zanzibar should be 100% Muslim. They say we have been here so long, why are there still Christians? We need to be more aggressive.

But we Zanzibaris say: Mission must be there, da'wa must be there, but we must respect each other each other's religion. We must be careful when we preach not to give hate speeches. So the pressure comes from those who do not understand our context, both on the church and the Muslim side. The situation is delicate; oppression is not there directly, but we can say that there are sometimes misunderstandings, some sort of violence, or pointing of fingers. But our history helps us to have a good foundation for dialogues and sharing, and to build up on good things and to move forward peaceably.

We share the Gospel through our Upendo programs. Upendo means love, in brackets: Jesus' love to other people. Upendo is a space where Christian and Muslim girls, women and families meet. The girls live and are educated together for two years, and they develop friendships, they develop trust. They start sharing what is happening in their lives, sorrow, happiness, sadness. They invite one another, when they get married, they invite each other. That did not happen be-

fore. And when they have a sorrow, they consult each other. Through their studies, they learn some entrepreneurship, some business. They learn how to contribute to their families' income. And so there are groups of women who have developed cooperative banking groups. Others have joined together to work as tailors. That means: these families now have a different perspective on Christian-Muslim relations. They know each other, they know the others are good people, because they are our friends. So Muslims know Christians and Christians know Muslims.

We also now have a nursery and a primary school. The parents asked us to start this. We have Christian and Muslim kids, and the Muslim girls wear a hijab which is part of the school uniform. Schools are wonderful platforms, because kids who have been growing up together, Christians and Muslims, they understand people from other religions. They know the others are human beings like us. And that is very important, because Christians and Muslims both have their own religious schools, madrasas and Sunday school. They are taught their different religions; they are taught that Christians are the good people and that Christianity is the true religion. And the Muslims learn the same things the other way round.

It is important that our school is affordable for normal families, Muslim and Christians. It costs only 1,000 Tanzanian shillings (approximately 0.37 US$) a day for your kid to go to school and even get a meal. We want normal families to bring their kids to this school. We say: Let them grow up together so that at the end we have a new generation that can peacefully coexist, people who know that there are different faiths, but we all are human.

So this is how we do mission, we do it as dialogue. Of course, there are Muslims who have converted, willingly. But it is not like we have a plan, like this year we will baptize 10 Muslims – it is not something like a trophy, something to proudly hold up and show like we are winning or they are losing. It doesn't work like that. We must make

sure that they experience the love of Jesus, the love of God, the love of Christ, and then the Holy Spirit will decide when the time is that they accept Jesus. It is not for us to decide when somebody converts, it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

⮑ Mission and the question of truth

Being a missionary always involves the idea that I want to convince others of something – specifically, of my Christian faith. But if I encounter someone of a different faith with this attitude, some difficult questions immediately arise:

- **Which religion is the true one?**
- **Or is there more than one true religion?**
- **If I am convinced of my faith, how do I evaluate the faith of people in other religions?**
- **What can I say theologically about other religions at all?**

In the first chapter, I wrote that some missiologists describe mission today as a virtue, that is, as a form of witness that points to Jesus Christ and to God's Kingdom, without necessarily aiming for and hoping for conversion. Figuratively speaking, Christians are not the salt of the earth so that everything will eventually become salt, but, as a permanent minority, to improve and preserve the world.

But if my faith is important to me, if I have a living relationship with God and experience the power of the Holy Spirit at work in my life, then it bubbles over! I want to tell others about what inspires, fulfills, renews, strengthens and moves me! Am I not almost automatically convinced that my faith is the right one?

For the colonial mission it was evident: the Christian faith is the only true faith. All other religions are superstition and idolatry. In the imperial mission, this sometimes even meant that missionaries actively destroyed temples or altars of other religions. In Germany, for example, the story is told of how the Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface felled the so-called Oak of Donar near Fritzlar in 723. This Oak of Donar was one of the most important Germanic shrines; sacrifices were made there to the god Donar. Under the protection of Frankish soldiers, Boniface had this tree felled to prove to the local Germans that their god was powerless.

Even today, there are still missionaries, often from the global North, who go to the global South and preach that Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism are idolatrous and that followers of these religions will go to hell forever if they do not convert to Christianity. Some go even further and call non-Christian religions 'demonic'; they see Muslims or Hindus, for example, as representatives of a power opposed to God. It is not surprising that such missionary activities, for example in Nigeria or India, repeatedly lead to interreligious conflicts and even bloodshed.

But what about the truth? After all, Jesus himself says: "I am the way, the truth and the life. There is no other way to the Father than through me." (John 14:6, New International Version) This verse is often used as proof that only faith in Jesus is true and thus saving faith. The problem with this is that the Biblical understanding of truth and our current understanding of truth are not the same.

For us, truth means that a statement corresponds to the fact that it states. "The cat is black." This statement is true, and therefore correct, if the cat is actually black, as I can see with my own eyes. However, if the cat is white, the statement is

false. If we apply this understanding to theological statements, we arrive at the following: dogmatic statements about Jesus are true if they correspond to the facts. However, this cannot be independently confirmed, but is purely a statement of faith. So, in this understanding, believing means accepting certain statements about Jesus as true/correct: for example, that Jesus is the Son of God, true man and true God, that Jesus died for my sins on the cross, that he was resurrected, etc.

But truth in the sense of the Bible is something completely different. The Hebrew word for truth, *aemaet*, can also be translated as "faithfulness". So truth is a relational concept! (This has been preserved in English: To be true to someone means to be faithful to someone.) The First Testament often speaks of God's *haesaed* (grace, favor) and *aemaet* together, thus expressing that God's grace and favor can be relied upon.

And in this way, we must also understand Jesus' words from the Gospel of John: Jesus says, "I **am** the truth". This does not mean that this or that dogmatic sentence **about** Jesus is the truth, but that the truth is a person! And here the line from the First Testament continues: In Jesus, the faithfulness of God, the reliability of his grace and goodness for all people is shown. And in this sense, he is the only way to the Father: for we can only find God if God himself shows himself to us.

> But this means that the truth in Jesus Christ is not subject to the Western opposition of right or wrong – in other words, if Jesus is the truth, all other religions must be wrong. And it is certainly not possible to claim, on the basis of this saying of Jesus, that Christianity is the true religion or the true faith, in the sense that only the

Christian dogmatic statements about God and Jesus are correct. Because the Biblical understanding of truth is not about right or wrong, but about reliable relationship and trust.

In my missionary encounters with people of other faiths, this means that I can talk about what I have experienced, learned and come to know. I can talk about how God has encountered me, what relationship I have with Jesus Christ, what God has done in my life. And I can invite people to give this Jesus a try themselves. But in doing so, I am not making any statement about the faith and lives of people who do not worship my God! When I talk about Jesus as the truth, it is not about being right, but about testifying to God's faithfulness to me (and to all people).

And so respect demands that I listen to people of other faiths when they in turn talk about how their God works in their lives and what their faith and spiritual practice mean to them. And in doing so, I can – at least in my experience! – also learn something for my own faith!

For example, when I am traveling in areas where many Muslims live, the first call to prayer from the mosque often wakes me up between 4 and 5 in the morning. I can be annoyed by this because I would like to sleep a little longer. But I can also remember that in Christian monasteries, people are also awakened early to pray so that the day begins with me focusing on God. And so I can let my Muslim brothers and sisters and their call to prayer remind me of my God – just as the church bells at 12 and 7 p.m. do at home.

Christian mission and Muslim da'wa: evangelism and dialogue

But it is not only the Christian faith that is missionary. Not only in Germany, but all over the world we also encounter Muslims who engage in *da'wa,* that is, they want to win other people over to Islam. How can we interact when each of us would prefer to convert the other to our own beliefs?

In October 2017, I co-organized an international think tank of Christians and Muslims on mission and *da'wa.* It was probably the first time anywhere in the world that committed believers from leading positions in the two religious communities discussed this difficult topic with each other.

One encounter at this conference has remained in my memory in particular. In a small group, a pastor from a country with a Muslim majority talked about the difficulties of building new churches for his growing congregations. "First of all, it is not easy to get a building permit at all. And then, when everything is approved, the neighbors often protest because they don't want a church in their neighborhood." A German Muslim woman responded spontaneously: "Oh brother, I can relate to that so well! It's the same for us when we want to build a mosque in Germany!"

I learned from this encounter: Especially missionary religious communities tend to exclude and oppress people of other faiths when they themselves are in the majority in a given place.

After an intensive week together, the Christian and Muslim participants of this think tank agreed on a joint document. It is a commitment to mission and *da'wa* – we admit that our faith urges us to pass it on to others. But this declaration is

also a confession of our desire to remain in dialogue with one another.

I find this declaration so important that I would like to present it to you in its entirety. The document begins with an introduction of the participants:

> ***I.***
> *In October 2017 we, a group of Muslims and Protestant Christians, women and men, met at Wuppertal and Witten, Germany, to discuss mission and da'wa. Our meeting was organized by the United Evangelical Mission. We come from different regions of the world: from Cameroon, Rwanda and Tanzania, from Indonesia and the Philippines, and from Turkey and Germany. In our countries, we all have experienced interfaith tensions and even violent conflicts. But all of us are dedicated to interfaith dialogue and to mission or da'wa.*

The following is a summary of our discussions: The next passage was formulated by the Muslim participants.

> ***II. Understanding da'wa***
> *a. Da'wa literally means "invitation" or "call".*
> *b. The understanding of da'wa has been changing throughout history. Today, the word has a different meaning in different contexts.*
> *c. We see two main concepts of da'wa:*
> *i. Towards Muslims: coaching, giving advice inside the Muslim community.*
> *ii. Towards non-Muslims: Expressing one's own faith by words, by being a good example and showing Islam as attractive.*

d. *Da'wa needs to be done in the best/most beautiful way and with (universal) wisdom. (Sura An-Nahl, 16:125)*
e. *As Mohammed was sent by God as messenger to submit (tabligh) the words and message of God, da'wa implies the collective duty of submitting the Islamic faith to others. The responsibility is only to submit, while the recipients are free to accept the message or not.*

Then the Christian participants explained their mission:

III. Understanding mission

1. *Mission literally means "sending".*
2. *The understanding of mission has been changing throughout history. Today, the word has a different meaning in different contexts.*
3. *The subject of mission is God himself: God's love incarnated in Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God which is justice, freedom, peace and love. (cf. Romans 14:17)*
4. *All Christians are participants in God's mission. In this, they follow the example of Jesus Christ who lived and taught humility and respect for others, who suffered rather than using force, and who did not judge others.*
5. *Christian mission is witness to God's love in words and deeds.*
6. *Participating in Christian mission, we hope for conversion and transformation of the world, but know that only God can bring those about. A metaphor might express that: Christian mission keeps sowing the seeds, but leaves the harvest to God.*
7. *Mission is open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit which may run counter to any of our plans.*

Finally, there are two big paragraphs which were formulated jointly by all participants:

> ***IV. Da'wa and mission***
>
> 1. *Unanimously, we reject any form of da'wa or mission which use force or manipulative means to convert someone.*
> 2. *In contrast to our understanding, we see that there are forms of da'wa and mission which use unacceptable means. Therefore, we need to develop ways to promote our understanding and to prevent unacceptable practices of da'wa and mission.*
> 3. *In this, we need to consider the role of majority and minority religions. Each religion – when in the majority – is tempted to misuse their position and dominate the others. There might be also blindness about the situation and therefore we need the view from the outside.*
> 4. *The concept of da'wa includes the idea that religions compete in good deeds (Sura AlMa'ida, 5:48). This idea can also be included in the concept of Christian mission.*
> 5. *When talking about da'wa and mission we have to talk about freedom: Freedom to share one's faith, to witness, to choose one's religion, to change one's faith, and to not adhere to any religion at all. It is painful when someone leaves our religion, but we need to accept this decision.*
> 6. *Both da'wa and mission call for holistic and contextual practice.*
> 7. *Our understanding of both da'wa and mission includes the protection of minorities. Da'wa protects the right of mission, and mission protects the right of da'wa.*

V. Interfaith dialogue

1. *Both as Christians and Muslims who faithfully trust in God, we are convinced of the truth of our respective faith. But because it is God who leads us to this conviction, we mutually respect the sincerity of the other's faith.*
2. *Interfaith dialogue is not an alternative to da'wa and mission as we understand it. Rather: Da'wa and mission lead us into interfaith dialogue.*
3. *Interfaith dialogue is about building bridges, mutual understanding, trust, solidarity, and cooperation, not only for one's own benefit, but for the benefit of humankind and the whole world.*
4. *Interfaith dialogue should not be limited to religious elites, but be open to all religious believers and should include policy makers.*

'We, the participants of the Think Tank "Mission and Da'wa" commit ourselves to the following:

1. *To overcome our mistrust of and prejudices against the believers of the other faith.*
2. *To self-critically reflect on our mistakes committed in mission and da'wa and to abandon those wrong practices.*
3. *To reject and fight aggressive and manipulative ways of mission and da'wa.*
4. *To defend the right to da'wa and mission in our specific areas of living and working.*
5. *To accept the freedom of any human being to choose one's religious adherence.*

6. *To regularly meet people of the other faith in order to build bridges of mutual understanding, trust, solidarity, and cooperation.*
7. *To work together with people of the other faith in transparency and mutual respect.*
8. *When planning any action, to seek the cooperation with people from the other faith, or at least to consider what this action might mean to them.*
9. *To take action to spread our understanding of da'wa and mission to the grassroots level and to include it in our interfaith dialogue.*

It was important to me to share this entire text with you because it shows so clearly how one can be a missionary, burn with the desire to spread one's own faith, and at the same time take people of other faiths seriously, respect them and even learn from them.

I head the Evangelism department of the United Evangelical Mission. Interreligious dialogue is also explicitly part of this work. We are certain that evangelism cannot be good if we do not approach others in a spirit of dialogue. And what is the point of a dialogue if we do not consider our own beliefs important enough to want to convince others of them?

In parts of the world that were shaped by Christianity for centuries, it often still seems difficult to think of mission and dialogue as going together. But it is often easier where Christians and Muslims have been living together for generations.

We need a spirituality of reciprocity

by Petrus Sugito (Salatiga, Indonesia)

Religion can act as a peacemaker or a warmonger. We believers decide which face our religion shows to the outside world. Likewise, I make decisions to arrive at theological and ethical views, and my spirituality also develops patterns based on my decisions. That is why I am describing my personal history here.

Chapter 1: Me and my family

I was born in the 1960s as the son of devout Muslim parents. They belonged to the so-called Abangan Muslims. In addition, there are the so-called Santri and Priyayi Muslims in Java.

Abangan Islam is a special Javanese form of Islam and is also called Islam Kejawen. Kejawen means everything that has to do with Javanese customs and beliefs (kejawaan). Kejawen is the native Javanese religion and at the same time a philosophy and moral code that develops rules for a noble life.

Santri are educated followers of Islam. They receive their education in Islamic boarding schools. These Santri have a good knowledge of Islamic theology. Priyayi, on the other hand, are members of Javanese society who descend from the nobility. In the 1960s, they led an exclusive life.

My parents' faith is influenced by Islam; they pray five times a day and fast. Nevertheless, they perform Javanese rituals associated with the life cycle, such as the traditional ceremonies in the 7th month of pregnancy, at birth, marriage and death. I still remember very well that during my childhood, offerings were made on each of my birthdays to pray for my safety and wisdom. Both my parents and their siblings were very inclusive and tolerant.

During my childhood, I learned to read and memorize the Qur'an. Every evening after the evening prayer (salat isya), I sat with peers

from my village in our small mosque to do so. I did this regularly until I finished primary school, around the age of 12. This was the first chapter in my life.

Chapter 2: Me and my faith

After primary school, I moved to the city of Salatiga in Central Java, where I attended middle school and then began teacher training and theology studies.

During my first year in Salatiga, I lived in the house of my Christian grandfather. After that, I lived in the house of my Muslim uncle. After graduating from middle school, my father, a simple farmer from a poor economic background, advised me to continue my studies at a teacher training college, even though I actually wanted to study automotive engineering.

The reason for this advice was that after graduating from teacher training, you could get a job as a teacher at a primary school without further study. I followed this advice and attended Widyatama Christian School, still in Salatiga. During my first year, I lived in the house of my Muslim uncle. After that, I moved into the dormitory.

At the teacher training college, I began to learn a lot about Christianity. I did not only learn in religious education classes at school, but also in the dormitory where there were morning and evening services. Although I was still a Muslim, I attended the Christian teacher training program in the afternoons, where graduates qualified to work as Christian teachers in elementary schools.

At school, in the dormitories and in the additional training, I got to know the essentials of Christianity as knowledge; it was not yet a conviction or faith. Whenever I returned to my hometown during the school vacations, I returned to the environment of my childhood and observed the rites of Islam, such as the five daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan.

This knowledge of Christianity proved to be the seed of the Christian faith. This seed grew and flourished in the conducive environment of the student dormitory. Finally, to cut a long story short, I decided to be baptized in the Javanese Christian Church in Salatiga. The baptism took place on April 27, 1983, in my third year of training, at the age of 18 and before my final exams. My baptismal name PETRUS was added to my birth name, which was originally just SUGITO.[7] For this reason, my name on official documents such as passports is only SUGITO, because that is the name on the birth certificate.

After graduating from the teacher training college in June 1983, my parents gave me the opportunity to continue my studies at university. At that time, graduates of the teacher training college were only allowed to study at faculties of social sciences, philosophy or theology.

I chose to study Indonesian literature because I wanted to become a writer, journalist or news reporter after graduating. My grandfather, a Christian, advised me to study theology. He told me that theology graduates could also become teachers, writers or reporters.

I didn't know much about Christianity, but I decided to study theology at the Faculty of Theology at the Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW). In addition to theology, the faculty offered three intensive courses of study: Christian religious education, pastoral care and the sociology of religion. I chose the intensive course in the sociology of religion. The second chapter of my life ended with me graduating in theology.

Chapter 3: Teacher and Missionary

After graduating in theology, I began my career as a lecturer at the UKSW in the Department of General Subjects and Humanities. I taught Christianity, Christian Ethics, the Fundamentals of Sociology

7 Many Javanese only use one name.

and the Fundamentals of Cultural Studies. The foundations of sociological and cultural studies are taught in a team-teaching system with junior and senior lecturers from different departments, so there were very intensive discussions when preparing for the lectures. It was the same during the lectures: discussions and debates took place not only between lecturers and students, but also between the lecturers.

I worked as a lecturer for nine years. Then I joined the Synod of the Christian Church of North Central Java (GKJTU), initially as an assistant to the General Secretary of the GKJTU for one year. My main tasks were those of a project officer; I supported the General Secretary in planning projects, helped with their implementation and prepared evaluations and reports.

After that, I served as an assistant pastor for two years before being ordained as a synodal pastor of the GKJTU synod. In the GKJTU, there are two categories of pastors: parish pastors and synodal pastors. Parish pastors are appointed by a parish and work there until they reach retirement age. Synodal pastors, on the other hand, are pastors ordained at the initiative of the synod leadership to perform inter-congregational services.

In 1988, I was elected Deputy General Secretary at the GKJTU Synod Assembly. Two years later, in 2000, I had to become General Secretary because the GKJTU General Secretary, Pastor Yohanes Sarju, suddenly died of a stroke. I performed this task until 2003. In 2003, I was re-elected and held the office until 2013.

The GKJTU Synod Assembly 2013 elected me as the Vice-President of the Synod for the period 2013-2018. However, I only held this office for one year. I resigned because I was appointed as the Deputy Head of the Asia Department of the UEM in 2014. I worked in this position at the UEM for nine years until my retirement in spring 2024. My main task was to run the UEM Asia regional office. I saw myself as an international missionary in this position.

What I have learned in my life for my faith

My family's pluralistic background is the basis for my open, tolerant and inclusive worldview and for my understanding of salvation: I find it in the form of concrete humanitarian acts, as described in Matthew 25:31-40.

Personally, I still struggle with the idea of some theologians that there is no salvation outside the church. How can you not struggle? It was my non-Christian parents who paid for my theological studies. Thanks to these studies, I became a pastor who was active in the world of ecumenism and local, national and even global partnerships.

My experience as a lecturer at the university has significantly shaped my theology of religions. I found the perspectives of the American theologian Richard Niebuhr on Christ and culture very helpful. Niebuhr distinguishes five ways in which the church relates to culture: radical anti-cultural churches, churches in their surrounding culture, churches beyond culture, churches in a paradoxical relationship to their surrounding culture, and churches that reform their culture.

It is not enough for the church to adopt a tolerant attitude towards those who are different from itself; rather, it is about something deeper and more fundamental, namely pro-existence and co-existence: an attitude of openness to the shared life of humans and nature in mutual dependence with the goal of peace, harmony and sustainability.

Working in the UEM regional office has inspired me to combine strategic management, holistic mission, intensive interreligious neighborly love and the broad horizons of partnership and ecumenism. The UEM pursues holistic mission; and its fundamental approach is global learning in an ecumenical perspective. This leads to a positive attitude towards plurality, and so we can develop an integrative theology and an integral concept of mission: preaching is the task of sowing or planting seeds. The growth of the seed and the harvest are God's business.

I have learned that there are six fundamentally different forms of spirituality, namely right action, sacred ritual, rational analysis, mystical search, shamanic meditation and devotion.

Right action: Faith is sustained by actions that are considered right. These include maintaining spiritual discipline, following moral principles and fighting for social justice. These actions are closely related to God and to God's will.

Sacred rites: faith is lived through rites that are considered sacred: sacred speech, sacred image (symbol, icon), sacred space, gesture, aroma; music, rites of passage at birth and death; baptism, confirmation; religious cycles, ecclesiastical calendar, traditional cultural calendar. Ritual is always about memory and imitation. The role of a religious leader is very important to maintain the rite. People with this tendency see God in order, structure and cycles.

Rational analysis: the appreciation of faith through research, study, discussion or study of the scriptures; theology that is done in a rational and systematic way. Cause and effect relationships are very important in the path of faith. God is most fully known through questioning and finding answers intellectually. Theology is seen as the study of God and leads to reflection on oneself and the world. (Personally, this is the most important approach to faith for me.)

Mystical search: Faith is lived through mystical practices to explore the supernatural or things that cannot be seen by humans and are beyond the reach of the ordinary human mind. To know and experience the mystical, meditation and spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage to places considered sacred are practiced.

In **shamanic meditation,** faith is lived in the presence of a shaman or spiritual guide. People have a stronger sense of God when they enlist the help of their spiritual guide. On the other hand, faith is lived with the conviction that people experience pain, danger, and poverty because of supernatural forces controlling them. For this

reason, people must go to the "other world" to seek healing. This includes exorcism to expel demonic powers.

Devotion: People live their faith by focusing on devotion. Personal devotion to God through prayer, quiet time, and personal contemplation is understood as an encounter with God that leads to spiritual growth. Strength and hope for others also arise from the connection with God. People with this inclination always have time to pause for themselves with God.

When I look at these different forms of spirituality, I realize that there is spiritual diversity and a diverse understanding of salvation in me as an individual. There is no one dominant and absolute truth. Imagine that in community life this diversity will become even more diverse. For this reason, openness and a willingness to build bridges that connect diversity are needed. The world is the setting for the living practice of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the act of mutuality, of simultaneous receiving and giving; of active, planned and organized encounters.

A Christian perspective on other religions?

But one question remains: How do I, as a Christian, view other religions if I do not claim that my faith is the only true one? Since the 1930s, many Christian scholars of religion and missiology have asked this question.

The answers are quite diverse. Here I would like to present two of them.

On the one hand, there are those who advocate a pluralistic approach. They say: All religions are different paths to God. How we think and experience God, and how we live our faith, is shaped by our respective culture and environment. But we must not absolutize this. Ultimately, none of us knows what God is really like. All our sacred scriptures, all our religious practices

are only approximations of the divine. That is why we do not need any missionary work. Everyone should be saved in their own way. The important thing is that we respect each other.

Representatives of this view emphasize that such pluralism can reduce tensions between people of different faiths. Unfortunately, however, such an attitude only works when we are sitting at our desks reading about other religions, or when I and the others have no strong religious convictions. When I meet people of other faiths who take their faith as seriously as I do, a detached pluralism is impossible.

However, one insight of pluralistic theology of religion has become important to me: namely, that the differences *within* a religious tradition can be much greater than the differences between certain groups from different religious traditions. Incidentally, you quickly notice this when you actually talk to people of other faiths! For example, Protestant Christians and Muslims from the Sufi tradition often get along quite well in Java. And both are afraid of Wahhabi-influenced fundamentalist radicals who throw bombs at both churches and Sufi mosques in Java.

Another personal example: years ago, I attended a concert as part of the Ruhrtriennale festival called Passion-Compassion. Western and Oriental music ensembles played arias from cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach and songs from the Muslim Sufi tradition together. I leafed through the booklet and was confused: without the names of the composers, I couldn't tell which songs were Christian and which ones were Muslim. Because all arias and songs were about connecting the human heart and its yearning with God and discovering love for people in the love of God.

And even if some (mostly *white,* male) religious scholars claim it, it is not possible to take a neutral point outside of re-

ligions and compare and judge them from there. This means: If I don't want to claim that my Christian faith is the only true and right one, then I can't make any fundamental statements about other religions.

And that brings me to a second position. This is the one that I personally share. It can be found in a statement from the San Antonio World Mission Conference in 1989:

> *"We cannot point to any other way to salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time, however, we cannot set any limits to God's saving power. There is a tension between these two statements that we acknowledge and cannot resolve."*

Some may perceive what is referred to here as tension as a contradiction. On the one hand, the World Council of Churches says quite clearly: as Christians, we can only point to Jesus Christ. He is the way to salvation which we have come to know personally and in which we trust. But on the other hand, it is also stated: God is greater than our thinking and theologizing. Where we see no way, God can still find one. And we know from the Bible that God yearns for the salvation of all people and that Christ died and rose again for all. Therefore, it would be presumptuous to say that only people of the Christian faith find salvation in our God. But that does not mean that everything is simply irrelevant. Because we belong to Christ, we talk about Christ and invite people to follow him.

A study paper by the World Council of Churches from 2006 developed this idea a little further and says what I myself also think:

"We must understand that human limitations and linguistic limitations make it impossible for any community to truly understand the mystery of salvation that God offers to humanity. Only in this humility can we say that salvation belongs to God, and to God alone. We do not possess salvation, we partake in it. We do not offer salvation, we bear witness to it. It is not for us to decide who will be saved: we leave that to God's providence."

In this chapter, I do not want to talk only from a Christian perspective about interreligious dialogue. That is why I asked Nurullah Yunfazira from Aceh for a contribution. She looks at the Christians as a Muslim.

How I as a Muslim look at Christians

by Nurullah Yunfazira (Banda Aceh, Indonesia)

As an Acehnese little Muslim girl living in a rural area in one of the Muslim-majority provinces in Indonesia, it was very rare for me to interact with other people of different faiths. As far as I remember, during kindergarten and elementary school my parents sometimes took me to the central market in downtown Banda Aceh. There I had an opportunity to encounter with Acehnese of Chinese ethnicity, which later I learned were mostly Christians and Buddhists. My mom used to buy clothes for me and my sibling from Chinese stores as according to her they had more styles and better quality materials as compare to others.

However, it is interesting to note that as a little girl at that time, even though I was aware that they were not Muslim, I didn't pay at-

tention to their religion nor did my parents ever address them based on their faiths. To me, I just accepted that they were different from us, they looked and dressed differently but they were still our people which with whom we shared country and citizenship. The same goes with the way I viewed churches and monasteries. They did not attract my attention, I just understood they were place where Christians and Buddhists gathered to worship their God.

That's why I was shocked recently, when out with my seven-year old nephew, he suddenly said: "Look at that Christian, she is sinful for wearing such revealing clothes". In several conversations with friends, I learned that their children also tend to judge other people of different faiths based on their own religious concepts. I believe that this major change in the way kids perceive differences relates to the increased attention to religion by the world. Nowadays religious labels are used more frequently than they were before, and religion has become an important aspect of a person's identity.

My first exposure to the knowledge of Christianity was during my years in the Islamic Boarding School Oemar Diyan for my Junior and Senior High School as well as during my undergraduate studies at the State Islamic University Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh. However, I did not learn about Christianity during these years in the context of interreligious studies. Rather, while studying subjects such as Islamic history, the Koran, the Sunnah, and Exegesis, I indirectly learned about several Christian views on the concept of religion as Islam and Christianity are basically from the same roots.

My major was in the Koran and the Sunnah. But the Faculty of Ushuluddin (Islamic Studies) and Philosophy had Religious Studies as one of its departments. Consequently, we were used to receiving public lectures from priests and other religious leaders. Interfaith dialogues were often held in large forums and were open to all students at the university, not just for religious studies students. Likewise, visiting churches and other places of worship was also common for us.

Frankly speaking, though, I must say that at that time I personally was not very interested in inter-religious studies or interfaith dialogue. However, the exposure to Christianity and other religions and a systematic education on my own religion during those years had an effect. Also, the attitude of my parents, teachers, lecturers, and people around me toward other believers led me to develop an appreciation of Christians and all other believers.

Later in my life, while I was in Bali for studying English and in Canada for continuing my studies, I experienced real friendships with many Christian friends. In Bali one of my close friends was an African pastor who at that time worked in Indonesia and studied Indonesian language at the same place where I studied English. He liked to bring up some Christian concepts in our conversations, and this increased my understanding of Christianity.

Afterwards, in Montreal I lived in an apartment together with a Christian girl, we shared the same bathroom and kitchen. During that year, we developed a strong friendship and often spent time together cooking, eating and cleaning the apartment. At the same time, I was also very close to another Christian girl of often came over to stay at my apartment. We also spent a lot of our free time together, discussing a lot of topics including the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam. We always debated in a respectful manner and were appreciative of each other's differences.

Again, I want to emphasize here that in my friendships with many people of different faiths, religion never played such a big role. They were friends, roommate, colleagues, lecturers etc. depending on how and who they were when I got to know them. Hence, when friends disappointed me, like for example when my friend repeatedly broke our agreement not to use my cooking ware when she cooked pork, I never judged her as a Christian, but I simply felt disappointed the same way as when my Muslim friend had made mistake towards me. All friends have weaknesses that I have to accept, and I am tru-

ly aware that no one can fully meet our expectations regardless of their religion.

My respect for and appreciation of Christians and other believers is part of my commitment to Islam. As a Muslim I have an obligation to respect other believers and their places of worship, and to act fairly. However, as a Muslim I believe that Islam is the only truth. Therefore, I must reject Christian concepts that conflict with Islamic concepts, such as the concept of original sin, the concept of the trinity, the concept of purgatory, eating pork and drinking wine. Apart from that, I find it difficult to understand the many sects in Christianity, and how each sect has its own congregation and church, unlike mosques which are open to every Muslim regardless of which Muslim group they belong to.

Although I had never been reluctant to involve myself in interfaith dialogue, my strong interest in interreligious studies and interfaith dialogue only arose after the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh, and my involvement in research on the impact of several local qanuns (Islamic laws) on minorities in Aceh. I am aware that without an understanding of people from other faiths, it is almost impossible to promote tolerance and justice.

Finally: to strengthen the relations among believers, one thing we need is interfaith dialogue and religious literacy. On the other hand, to build closeness, togetherness and brotherhood between believers, I think it is necessary to involve children and youth in many joint activities. In this way, they no longer view people of different religions as a different group, but rather as friends or neighbors. Friendship has the potential to eliminate negative prejudices and perceptions of each other, and to foster a sense of shared responsibility to solve problems and maintain peace in society.

Chapter 7

Heal the sick and cast out demons – power evangelism

What? For readers in Germany, this headline seems strange. In our mainline Protestant church environment, mission is understood to mean that preaching and witnessing to the Gospel go hand in hand with diaconal, social and political engagement. The mission of the church includes hospitals and health centers, facilities for people with disabilities, kindergartens and schools, counseling centers, agricultural development projects …

But few people in my church have ever realized that this commitment of the churches is one that could ultimately function without God. Because it is planned, managed and evaluated as if God did not exist. Yes, the Christian faith may be the motivation of the people who work in such projects and institutions. And sometimes consideration is given to how the organization and life in such institutions can reflect the Christian faith. But it is always about the actions of people.

This has a lot to do with the fact that in the global North, a rationalist, narrow worldview has become dominant. Christians in the North see the world as the realm of nature, and God as a power from the beyond that does not intervene in nature and its laws. In popular belief, the idea of angels as protective intermediaries is still often found, but theologically it plays no role. God's action in the world is almost exclusively understood as an internal human change – in the world, God acts through people who allow themselves to be called, changed and guided by God. "God has no hands except ours" is a sentence that sums up this attitude well. And we don't expect prayer to change God, but primarily ourselves. It is no coincidence that prayers in our culture are often disguised ethical demands: "God, help the sick, send someone to visit them," or "Make us peacemakers."

I keep asking myself: Don't bourgeois, *white,* middle-class Christians need a God who intervenes in their lives because they are doing well and feeling safe? A Nigerian Pentecostal pastor colleague once said it this way: "You always have electricity, so you don't need a God to protect you. But when you can't rely on infrastructure, you depend on God to survive."

"Heal the sick and cast out demons" – our Northern churches have demythologized this call and turned it into "build hospitals and run diaconal institutions". But if you take it literally, you cannot help but expect and request God's concrete, often miraculous intervention in people's lives.

> "Heal the sick and cast out demons." This is a completely different ecclesiastical practice. In Western Europe, it is rare and often only found in small Christian groups

on the fringes. In the Global South, on the other hand, it is not only widespread among the growing and large Pentecostal churches, but can also be found in Catholic and Protestant contexts.

In the global South, the vast majority of people, whether they are Christians, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists, believe that the world, the realm of nature, is not separate but closely interwoven with the supernatural. There is an intermediate world in which angels and demons, ancestors and spirits of the dead abound. This intermediate world has a strong influence on the world we see. The well-being of human families is influenced by the spiritual activity of their ancestors; demons have a destructive effect on human life and relationships. Natural laws answer the question of how, but for the question of why, the answers are sought in this intermediate world. For example: a child was run over because she ran into the street without looking back. But who cast a spell or which demon moved the car to exactly where the child was walking? Spirits are seen as intervening in human lives, but God as well. God acts and gets involved in this world, not only by changing people interiorly, but also in ways that are external, material, and visible.

These different worldviews also have a massive impact on how Christians understand "salvation". What exactly did Jesus Christ do for us? And how does that change my life?

In the Protestant theology of the global North, "salvation" has become an otherworldly, non-material thing. Salvation is the justification of sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which finds its fulfillment in eternal life. We believe in this justification; it is not really visible in earthly

life, because we are, after all, *simul iustus et peccator*, both justified and still sinners. There is the ethical claim that as a Christian one should live a changed life and thus bear witness to the Christian faith. And there is the idea of the certainty of faith or salvation, a deep inner knowledge that we are loved and unreservedly accepted by God. But we no longer believe that God's salvation is reflected in our material lives.

In the Global South, and especially in the Pentecostal churches that strongly influence Protestant and Catholic believers there, salvation is understood not only in the hereafter, but also in this world and in material terms.

Salvation therefore means not only that people's sins are forgiven, and that they can hope for eternal life. Above all, it means that Christ, through his death and resurrection, has defeated the anti-divine, life-threatening forces of the intermediate world (be they envious ancestors, demons or witchcraft). And those who belong to Christ already share in this victory in this earthly life. This includes experiencing material blessings: good harvests, healthy children, and a decently paid, secure job.

An everyday example of how earthly blessings are perceived: A large number of people in sub-Saharan Africa die in car accidents every year. And so it is natural for Christians to pray for God's protection and preservation before every car journey, and not to get out of the car after arriving safely until they have thanked God for this protection.

This also includes healing from illnesses. Of course, you go to a doctor if there is one and you can afford the treatment! But people also know that illnesses usually have a spiritual dimension and that the doctor can only heal if she is supported by prayer. And often enough there is no doctor at all, or he is poorly trained and has hardly any medication, or the treat-

ment is too expensive – then prayer is the only option anyway. The expectation is that God will heal – and indeed, people in the Global South often experience their illnesses disappearing after a prayer. I heard hundreds of such healing stories in the People's Republic of China in the 1990s. The widespread experience of miraculous healings led to explosive growth in the Christian churches in China; one church leader estimated at the time that around half of all baptisms of new Christians were due to experiences of healing.

And that is why churches in the Global South not only build and run hospitals, schools and social welfare institutions, but are also increasingly incorporating prayer for the sick and the exorcism of demons (deliverance ministry) into their practices.

"But that's pre-Enlightenment! I don't want to go back there!" This is quite often the reaction when I talk in Germany about how Christians in the Global South pray for the sick and cast out demons.

The very formulation makes it clear that there is a pejorative view behind it: Namely, that we here in the global North are enlightened and thus intellectually further along than people in the global South, who first have to reach our level. Clearly, this is an implicitly racist attitude.

And indirectly, this defensive reaction also says: I don't have to deal with this world view because it is "backward." But you don't have to turn off your mind when you read the following sections.

Ecumenism and post-coloniality mean: We challenge each other and take every point of view seriously. Only in this way can we learn together!

I have personally experienced this as a very enriching encounter: meeting people who pray for the sick and cast out

demons, the intensive discussions with them and the joint theological reflection have changed and deepened my faith. That is why I invite you to be challenged by the next two authors!

Healing in relation to the ministry and evangelism

by Kingsley Weerasinghe (Colombo, Sri Lanka)

The mission to heal that was given to the church is now being revived all over the world. This results in drawing non-believers or slumbering Christians into the fold, or at least in getting their attention focused to 'see' God's abilities and power through miracle-healings. Even members of mainline church communities realize that God's healing is one of the most important ways by which congregations could be kept alive, and thus concentrate on this ministry. Faith in divine healing is increasing rapidly among the Christians in Sri Lanka, and through them to our non-Christian brothers and sisters in their social and family circles as well as in their neighborhoods. As a minister of the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka, what I will share here are my personal experiences in the healing ministry.

Let me begin with some Biblical observations:

The Bible, both in the Old and the New Testament, reveals our God as the God who gives healing to his people. In fact, God revealed himself as 'The Lord who Heals' (Ex. 15:26), quite early in the Bible. Thus, with healing as a component of his very nature, it is not surprising that we discover that this God of the Bible gives not only spiritual or mental healing, but physical healing too. The Bible discloses God as the God who has the power to heal, and that this divine healing becomes a tool of his mission on earth. This is why the Holy Spirit will help us in the mission field to engage in the healing ministry as well. Thus, God has given us the ability to carry his command through with

divine healing as a door that opens hearts to grow into faith and love of God as Jesus used this divine power.

The New Testament shows us that Jesus healed people who suffered from a variety of diseases. The Gospel of John describes miracles as signs of the Kingdom of God. Jesus gave equal importance to the healing ministry as to other ministries and he healed the sick wherever he went, which resulted in people being drawn to him. What we must remember is that some of those who came may have come just for the healing – out of sheer desperation or to see a miracle taking place, or to check whether all they had heard was true. But his healing ministry would have opened the door for even those people to hear his teaching as well. Three words describe Jesus' ministries: Teaching, preaching, healing.

Jesus also imparted the healing ministry to his disciples through the Holy Spirit. Matthew 10:1 says, "and having called to him his twelve disciples, he gave to them power over unclean spirits," so that they could cast them out. It was the Lord Jesus who gave this power to heal the sick, not that this power was inherent in them. Only when they had received the power of the Holy Spirit they were able to heal others.

The Book of Acts furnishes plentiful evidence of the apostles and others in the early church exercising this gift. The epistle of James refers to a ministry of healing carried out by the elders of a local church acting collectively (James 5:14). Among the spiritual gifts enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.28 is the gift of healing. Paul speaks of the gift of healing as being distributed along with other spiritual gifts among the ordinary members of the church. There were people, it would seem, who occupied no official position in the community, and who might not otherwise be distinguished among their fellow members, but this special charisma of healing had been bestowed upon them.

Healing: My personal experiences

At the beginning of my ministry, I was appointed to a church at Bandarawela in the mountainous region of the country. One day a

lady, a Buddhist, came to see me. She shared with me all her physical pain due to a disease she was suffering from, and she pleaded for me to do whatever possible according to my religion. I invited her to come back the next day. The following day, I asked one of my church workers to join me as I did not really have faith in healing through prayer. I asked him to pray for her. While he prayed, I heard this lady making a strange noise, and then she fell to the ground. I was amazed to see this. The church worker who prayed for this lady said that it was necessary to pray for her the next day too.

When the lady came the next day, I laid my hand on her head and prayed for her. Again she fell to the ground, but there was a severe backlash on my body too. I felt as if I had been pummeled and was being throttled. So I went to the Word and found that it was necessary for me to fast before such prayer. On the third day, my wife and her grandmother also joined in the prayers. I had of course fasted. This lady fell to the ground and made a very strange noise. Finally she gave a great cry, "Jesus, don't come. I am going!" Then she came to her proper senses and asked what had happened to her. I asked her how she was, and she said, "I have no more pain".

Hallelujah, God had delivered her from the demon which caused her disease, and he had delivered me from my lack of faith! This incident changed my heart and my thinking totally. I was convinced that this lady was liberated solely through the power of prayer. This altered my approach towards my ministerial service, and I hoped for the Holy Spirit's gift of healing to be operated through me.

God convinced me that he was turning me in a new direction. I found fairly soon after that he was using his power to heal through me. God used the consequences of this lady's actions to prove this change to me. She began to spread the news of her healing everywhere she went, and people started to visit me asking me to pray for them. I prayed and I found people receiving miraculous healing. This was just the beginning of God's work of healing through me.

There was another experience. One day, a lady, again a Buddhist, came to see me with her little daughter and said that her daughter was suffering from Meningitis, and that this child had been discharged from the hospital after being there a whole month but now she had a high fever again. She also said that she took this child to a physician in the area and he had advised to admit the child to the hospital as soon as possible. She was terrified at what the physician had told her about the consequences of this disease which could leave her child disabled. This mother was helpless and confused, she begged me to pray for the child. I took the child in my arms and prayed for her. After praying I gave the child to her mother. After about ten minutes we noticed that the child's body was wet. She was perspiring! Quickly the fever went down. Praise God! The next day the lady came to see me with the child and shared with me what had happened. She said that after they went home, her daughter had begun to play with her toys and had continued to play until midnight. That disease never returned to her. The child was delivered and she was not beset with physical disabilities.

I would also like to share how healing through prayer is a support to the preaching ministry and the evangelism ministry of the church.

One day a man, a father of three children and the head man of his village came to see me. His wife had suffered from womb cancer for a long period and at this stage she had started to bleed – profusely, nonstop. After seventeen days of this bleeding, someone had told him to come to our church. The next day he brought his sick wife to our church for prayer. I prayed for his wife. After praying, I asked, "Did you feel anything while I prayed?" and she said, "I feel as if the bleeding has stopped," and it really had! She had received healing. All the members of that family acknowledged that she had been healed. The result of this healing was that this whole family accepted our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as their Lord as well. Because of this miraculous experience, this family began to spread news of this happening

everywhere in the village. They boldly shared with people how Jesus had healed their mother. To God be the glory.

This healing experience released them from a great burden and resulted in their becoming strong Christians. Because they shared this experience with others it automatically opened doors to evangelism among so very many people. Also because of this occurrence, not only did many people begin to come for prayer to me, but they gathered in one place for worship. Today it is a big Christian community where a new church worker is ministering. All glory is to God.

Some years later, I was sent to a city called Galle in the south of the country. There I had to minister to two churches, one of which was more than one hundred years old but did not have a single member attached to that church anymore. This church, situated in a historically famous area called the Galle Fort, had been closed for more than 50 years due to the lack of members. The other church, where I resided, had a fairly good membership. I started to pray with them and in answer to our prayers God healed some church members miraculously. The news began to spread. With these new happenings, I started worship in this empty church.

With the news of people's healing experiences being spread in the area, people started to come for healing. One day, members of a strongly Buddhist family, a mother with her 18 year old daughter, came to see me. She had cancer and at the time she came to the church, she was extremely ill. I prayed with her after the service laying my hand on her head. Suddenly she fell to the ground. When she got up, I asked her what happened to her. She said that something like a big electrical shock went through her and that she did not know what happened after that until she awoke on the ground. Two weeks after this she was again taken to the hospital by her family as scheduled. It was then that they got to know that a miracle had taken place. The test reports found that the cancer was healed. Praise the Lord.

There was a certain high placed gentleman and his wife, both Anglicans, in Galle who had no children. This was due to the husband having been a victim of the disease called Mumps, and as a result he had become infertile. Doctors had informed him that they would have to go to Singapore for treatment but even with treatment there was no guarantee of success. They had gone to Singapore, but ultimately even that treatment failed. One day they invited me to pray for them, and I went to their home. Several weeks after the prayers, they gave a telephone call to me to say she had conceived. Hallelujah Jesus. Now they have a daughter who is five years old.

The church that had been closed now has a healthy congregation with a church-appointed worker to look after the flock. During my time there, as a result of this healing ministry, I was able to reach many areas and form about seven worship groups. The final outcome was that these worship groups were accepted by the Methodist Church as a circuit.

There were many similar healings. People talked about them, and the healing ministry became very popular among the Christians as well as the non-Christians. All these experiences opened gates for me to build up fellowship with non-Christians and Christians who were churchgoers but with no real relationship with the Lord. This gave me the opportunity also to share the Christian message with all of them.

My conclusions

Sri Lanka's Christian population (Catholic and non-Catholic Christians together) is 7.5%.

Prayer for healing is not the only ministry that the church has to carry out; but all mission activities finally bring healing to the people and the nation. But concentrating on developing this ministry to pray for people's diseases and sicknesses and helping them to experience our living God will produce more results in church life. It can be used as an effective method to reach the non-reachable. It also builds up

very good partnerships with non-Christians. There are several people whom I have met in my ministerial life who have not become Christians, but because of the healing they experienced they have become good friends of Christians. They even help and support the church.

There was a Buddhist couple, both teachers, whom, in answer to prayer, God blessed with a beautiful boy. They never became Christians, but whenever they have time, they go to church and also support church activities. Yet this is not the end but a beginning, for the Holy Spirit would do the rest and draw each of these persons to form an active relationship with our God. All glory and honor is to God.

Therefore, I recommend giving a prominent place in the church to practice the healing ministry and to use it effectively. It helps the whole congregation to become more vibrant and grow into a living church.

↪ Kingsley Weerasinghe describes some of the healings he has experienced as exorcisms. In many churches in the Global South, especially in the charismatic ones, there is not only the ministry of healing or prayer for the sick, but also the so-called deliverance ministry. The prerequisite for deliverance ministry is the idea that illnesses, infertility (both of fields and of people), poverty and unemployment, accidents and other life-limiting events are the result of interventions from the spirit world. Demons, witchcraft and sorcery are the ultimate cause of these experiences. If, for example, a married couple has not had children even after several years, or if young people cannot find work despite having a good education, many ask: Who has bewitched me? Or what action of my ancestors has led to a demon being able to harm my life?

In such cases, people seek deliverance services, that is, deliverance from these spirit forces that are harming their physical lives.

The idea of spirit forces harming people can be found in all major religions and traditional cultures, as can the practice of deliverance services: shamans in Indonesia summon the spirits of dead people, and fetish priests in Cameroon help women who are infertile. Where Christian churches practice deliverance ministries, they often incorporate elements of traditional cultures and beliefs about demons, but against them they use the power of the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. A Christianity that dismisses these traditional beliefs as superstition and offers no practice for dealing with them is rapidly losing influence in the Global South. And it is precisely people in Protestant churches who then often take a two-pronged approach: they go to church on Sundays, but when problems arise they seek the help of priests from traditional religions.

Mission and deliverance in the context of Rwanda

by Emmanuel Muhozi (Butare, Rwanda)

I am a theologian and engaged in a study grounded in the hypothesis that if Christians from mainline Protestant churches in particular are joining neo-Pentecostal congregations in search of deliverance practices, it is due to perceived shortcomings in the contextualization of the gospel message within the Presbyterian Church's missional evangelism efforts.

The study's objectives include exploring Rwandan's perspectives on life, disease, and healing, assessing life and salvation concepts within the Presbyterian Church, and analyzing the intersections between Rwandan's deliverance notions and the Presbyterian Church's concept of salvation. I employed qualitative research techniques such

as interviews, discussions, and literature reviews to get into the depth of the problem.

Key aspects of the findings

The phenomenon of Deliverance Ministry, predominantly observed in neo-Pentecostal Churches, has gained significant traction, attracting a substantial number of Protestants and Presbyterians, prompting some to shift from their mainline churches to neo-Pentecostal congregations. This trend is linked to the correlation between Deliverance Ministry practices and the Rwandan-African religion, which encompasses perspectives on treatment, healing, and life protection. In contrast, mainstream churches, including the Presbyterian Church, lack conceptual alignment with African worldviews and Rwandans' norms.

The study illuminates that Rwandan culture, with its essential elements, is transmitted orally and practically through generations, reflecting a profound commitment to preserving its nature. Also, the study emphasizes that religion and language form the foundation of Rwandan people's lives. Religion, holding a central role, permeates every facet of their existence, fostering a profound reliance on God. The Rwandans firmly believe in God's pervasive presence, seeking solace and encouragement in times of difficulty through their faith.

Christian missionaries introduced Christianity to the Rwandans by incorporating the concept of God, Imana, into their teachings. However, they misunderstood the Rwandans' cosmological beliefs, where Imana holds the highest position, encompassing various entities as agents or mediators. Imana is perceived as transcendent, beyond the physical world, connected to human affairs through these mediators. Some missionaries mistakenly claimed that the Rwandans were worshiping deities, leading to a limited Christian perspective among some Banyarwanda Christians.

The Banyarwanda's profound perception of life, rooted in spiritual beliefs, shapes their understanding and daily actions. They view God as the ultimate giver and sustainer of life, leading a worshipful life that permeates all aspects of their existence. Their faith influences decisions and interactions, recognizing the divine presence in ordinary moments; their spirituality revolves around pursuing a fulfilling life through prayers, emphasizing well-being and the significance of wealth. Their perception of life is intertwined with deliverance, acknowledging the divine origin of life and the interconnectedness of dimensions for a harmonious existence.

In this regard, healing is comprehensive, addressing physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The study highlights a significant healing model among the Rwandans known as "kugangahura" which is deliverance. Deliverance is a crucial practice for Rwandans, eliminating issues rooted in social or religious backgrounds, including infertility, sickness, difficulties in marriage, etc. Despite the presence of modern medical facilities, a substantial portion of the population turns to religion for health, highlighting the profound influence of religious faith on health-seeking behaviors.

Presbyterian missionary efforts were initially well-received, aligning with the community's belief in God as the ultimate Savior and Healer. However, a focus on medical treatment (in hospitals) led to a perception that the Christian God primarily addressed physical matters, causing conceptual challenges. The emergence of deliverance ministry challenged mainstream churches, revealing a lack of incorporation of Rwandan culture in missionary efforts. The study emphasizes that the appeal of deliverance ministry is deeply rooted in the profound beliefs of the Rwandans themselves.

The study reveals a notable demand for deliverance among the Rwandans, emphasizing its significant role in their lives. However, it highlights the misuse of the term "deliverance" by some seeking financial gain. This is partly due to the fact that the mainline churches'

missionary work in Rwanda left unaddressed certain life issues related to Christian faith, life, and healing. This challenges the Presbyterian Church to conduct deeper research on traditional and biblical models, specifically kugangahura and deliverance. The recommended approach involves contextualizing kugangahura within the Rwandan cultural context for a more accurate understanding. The study advocates for a dual strategy: indigenizing the biblical model and Christianizing the traditional model of kugangahura. This aligns with the educational principle that learning processes begin with the known and progress to the unknown.

With a growing demand for deliverance among Rwandan Christians, the church must adapt its approach by recognizing the centrality of deliverance in their spiritual lives. A thoughtful and culturally sensitive approach is essential to effectively meet this need, fostering a deeper connection to faith and religious practices within the community.

➥ Weerasinghe and Muhozi have made it clear that Christians in their countries are looking for a faith and a Christian practice that incorporates their traditional culture and ideas of a spirit world – which, incidentally, is not foreign to the Bible either. The question of what consequences one's own Christianity has for material life is always at stake. A God who does not visibly bless is not very convincing.

Material salvation?

In Germany, however, this notion hardly plays a role in the Christian faith today. This is not least due to the fact that, as a result of our Lutheran background, the Gospel has been summarized for centuries with Romans 3:23-24: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They owe it, therefore, to his grace alone that they are accepted by God as righteous.

He grants it to them on the basis of the redemption that has taken place through Christ Jesus." This means that the core of the Gospel is the message of God's grace, of the forgiveness of sins.

But that is only one possible summary of the Gospel. In the Global South today, another is more important: "Jesus says: I have come to give them the true life – life in all its fullness." (John 10:10, New International Version) 2 Corinthians 8:9 is often added: "You know the grace that our Lord Jesus Christ has bestowed on us. Though he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (New International Version)

Life in abundance and becoming rich are not only a spiritual reality, but above all a material one. Whoever is a child of God shares in God's riches, and this is already evident today. I was told this very specifically by poor farmers in the barren mountain region of the Chinese province of Yunnan: "We are Christians and rest on Sundays, as God's commandment tells us. So we don't go to our fields on Sundays. And that's why God has blessed us: our potatoes are bigger than those of our non-Christian neighbors, who work in their fields seven days a week."

So the missionary message is: God can and will visibly bless your life on this earth.

But what if Christians work hard, believe and pray and still remain poor?

This question is already asked in the Bible. And we find conflicting statements about it: On the one hand, there is the firm certainty that God materially blesses those who follow God's commandments. Jesus also says that those who give up something for his sake will receive manifold returns in this life (e.g. Luke 18:28-30). On the other hand, the Psalms already

contain the desperate question of why the wicked prosper while those who follow the commandments fare so poorly. The despair of this question stems precisely from the fact that God has actually promised otherwise.

This contradiction cannot be easily resolved.

But that is precisely what is being tried again and again. The so-called Prosperity Gospel is spreading, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in other parts of the world. It takes the idea that God blesses his children materially and links it to the idea of sowing and reaping: in order to receive God's blessing, believers should first sow, that is, donate. The more they give, the more God will give back to them.

I have seen in small Pentecostal churches in Ghana how beneficial such a theology can be. Based on their faith that God provides for them abundantly, the members of these communities actively support each other. And together they often manage to free themselves from poverty and achieve a modest level of prosperity.

But there is also serious abuse. In Accra, I once attended a Pentecostal church service where the preacher called out to the people: "You have all saved to pay the school fees for your children next week. If you put this saved money in the collection plate today, I promise you: you will have ten times as much in your pockets next week!" And if the money doesn't miraculously come in the following week, the preacher will tell the people that their faith is obviously still too small. Or that someone has used witchcraft against them and that this curse must first be lifted …

Protestant churches in Africa call this 'misleading theologies'. Sociologists of religion speak of a 'cargo cult': the only thing that matters is one's own material advantage, which is to be secured through ritual operations (for example, the lifting of curses through prayers of liberation or donations to a pow-

erful preacher). Here, neo-capitalism with its individualistic promises of salvation and consumption has completely taken over the Gospel. The church as a community of those who follow God's commandments becomes unimportant – the main thing is to follow a 'man of God' (usually such preachers are men, rarely women), whose powerful prayers promote one's own social advancement. The fact that it is mainly the 'man of God' who becomes rich as a result of the donations does not deter people: after all, he is seen as a living example of how God can create such wealth in the lives of others.

Misleading theologies also exist in the area of prayers for healing. Some preachers demand a donation before they pray for the sick. And if healing does not occur immediately, they tell the sick that they have not yet donated enough. Or that their faith is not yet strong enough for them to be healed.

These theologies are cruel because they blame the poor for their poverty and the non-healed sick for their illness. And they have nothing to do with the Biblical message! Because in the entire First and Second Testament, the basic issue is never individual salvation and/or earthly well-being, but always community. In the First Testament it is Israel, in the Second it is the *ekklesia,* the community of the called-out ones. The mission of these communities is to show the world what it looks like to follow God's commandments: to be in solidarity with the poorest and weakest and those on the margins of society, to support each other materially, and in this way to invite others to worship this God and to live in this community according to his guidelines.

An Indian colleague who was in Germany for six months once said to me years ago: "I can clearly see that

Germany is Christian. I recognize it from your social welfare rules. No one has to go hungry or freeze here, and the sick are cared for even if they cannot pay for it. And that's why I call Germany a Christian country, even if only a few people go to church here anymore."

Chapter 8

Mission and context – everywhere different

The previous chapters have already shown: how a church lives its mission is totally different in different situations. The mission of a church in a post-Christian environment is different from the mission of a church in a country where Christianity is the majority religion. And whether a church lives as a minority church among Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims will shape it differently in each case.

I am talking here about the religious or non-religious environment. But there are also other differences: socio-economic, political and cultural.

Socio-economic differences

The mission of a rich church is probably characterized by projects, a high proportion of professionally qualified full-time staff, clear administrative structures and responsibilities, and power. Those who have money determine what happens,

which projects are supported and which are not. Open or even critical feedback from the recipients of such mission is difficult – after all, they don't want to risk their good relationship with the donor!

The mission of a poor church looks quite different. It is mainly based on the work of dedicated volunteers. Leadership and administrative structures are usually rather weak. And the mission of such churches relies heavily on people accepting it.

In the poor Chinese hinterland, old women were still going from village to village as itinerant evangelists in the 1980s. Mostly widows, their children having left home, they gave up their permanent residences and only owned what they could carry themselves. They found accommodation in the villages where they preached; they were cared for by the local people. A mission very close to what we read in Luke 10:2-8.

Political differences

This is where it gets complex! Of course, it obviously makes a difference whether a country guarantees religious freedom or not.

In Germany, Tanzania or Brazil, it is easy to found a new church or, for an existing church, to establish new congregations as well as social and diaconal projects. This applies not only to locals but also to foreigners. International financial support is also unproblematic.

In an environment that does not recognize religious freedom, however, mission is difficult. In Sri Lanka, for example, it is almost impossible to get permission to build a church building when a new Christian community has been formed. And even if permission is granted, local Buddhist monks often incite the surrounding population to prevent the church from

being built. Stones and sometimes even incendiary devices are thrown. That is why the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka only builds new church buildings in exceptional cases, although it regularly sends evangelists to villages where there are no Christians at all. When small new communities are formed there, they meet in private homes. When the group gets a little bigger, a large canopy is added to the house. And if a community grows even more, it is divided. The Methodist Church strictly separates its social and diaconal projects from its evangelistic work. They do this because the Buddhist-influenced government accuses the churches of using their social projects as nothing more than an attempt to bribe and manipulate people into becoming Christians.

But this is not just about how much religious freedom there is in a country. If the church's mission is holistic, then the question arises as to whether a church can really live what it learns from the Gospel.

In the Philippines, for example, religious freedom is guaranteed; changing from one religious community to another is not a problem. But wealth in this country is extremely unevenly distributed: a few large landowning families own most of the fertile arable land, while 70% of the farmers are landless. But when pastors and staff of the United Church of Christ call for social justice and land redistribution based on the Gospel, they are denounced as "communists" by politicians who benefit from the status quo (this is called "red-tagging"). Those who are once branded in this way are often arrested and imprisoned under flimsy pretexts or immediately murdered by hit squads.

> *In November 2022, two pastors and an elder of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) asked the Philippine Supreme Court for protection from troops of the*

59th Infantry Battalion, which had allegedly red-tagged them as supporters of the Communists.

UCCP pastors Edwin and Julieta Egar and elder Ronald Ramos said the troops had "severely coerced" them to surrender and admit that they belonged to the New People's Army (NPA), despite a lack of evidence.

They added that there was an "overt threat of military operation" against them based on various text messages sent to them.

On October 31, Ramos and Egar said they were approached by men who identified themselves as members of the 59th Infantry Battalion, accused them of being members of the NPA, and ordered them to surrender. Another attempt was made a day later.

On November 2, Ramos said he received a series of text messages telling him that his house would be searched and firearms and explosives would be planted in a "one-time, large-scale operation". Another message said he would be killed in a fake shootout.

The Philippine Supreme Court rejected the petition.

Cultural differences

And then, finally, there are cultures.
What is the relationship between the Gospel and culture, and what does that mean for mission? This question was deliberately not asked at the beginning of this chapter. Because much

of what is read as a 'cultural' difference is actually shaped by socio-economic or political conditions.

A small example: in intercultural church cooperation in Germany, German pastors like to complain that African pastors do not come to committee meetings to which they have been invited. They conclude that, apparently, committees are not important in African cultures. But this is a misunderstanding. The reason why African pastors are often unable to accept invitations to German committees is that these committees meet during daytime working hours. And the pastors of African immigrant congregations in Germany are hardly ever full-time employees of their churches, but usually pursue a bread-winning profession. The difficulties in working together are therefore economic and not cultural.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the Gospel and culture is something we need to consider. Let's start with the Gospel: What exactly is 'the Gospel'? For some, it can be summarized in a few dogmatic sentences. Very popular for evangelism all over the world is the version of the US American Bill Bright from the 1950s, also known as the "four spiritual laws" or the "four spiritual truths":

> 1. *God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.*
> 2. *Humans are sinful and separated from God. Therefore, they cannot recognize and experience the love and plan of God for their life.*
> 3. *Jesus Christ is God's only way for humans to escape from sin. Through him you can get to know and experience the love of God and his plan for your life.*
> 4. *We must personally accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord in order to experience God's love and His plan for our lives.*

This summary is by no means universal and just needs to be translated into other cultures. In reality, this is a representation of the Biblical message that is shaped throughout by the white, middle-class culture of the United States in the last century: On the one hand, it is exclusively about individuals and their life plan. This is quite different from the message of the Bible, where people are always and exclusively seen in community. On the other hand, the idea of a plan for a successful life is also due to the *white,* middle-class culture of the United States; it does not appear in the Bible, nor is this idea relevant for people who have to ensure their survival every day.

Don't get me wrong: Bill Bright's summary is catchy and corresponds to the context in which it was created. But it is just *one possible* summary of the gospel.

> The fact that we talk about the Gospel at all, as if there were only one, is already misleading. In the Bible, we find – and this is no coincidence! – four gospels, four times the story of Jesus, his life, his actions, his preaching, his death and his resurrection. And these four gospels are clearly different in style and content and sometimes even contradictory!

Just a few examples: In Luke's gospel, the virgin birth of Jesus plays a major role; Matthew, on the other hand, begins with a family tree of Jesus that leads through Joseph. The sermons of Jesus in the gospel of John have a completely different wording and style than the sermons that are handed down in Mark, Matthew and Luke. John interprets Jesus' death as a sacrifice planned by God, analogous to the Jewish Passover lamb; for

Luke, Jesus' death is a judicial murder, which God only makes relevant to the whole world through the resurrection.

And then there are also the Pauline letters. They have no interest at all in the concrete life of Jesus and what he said, but merely reflect the significance of his death and resurrection. That is why they tell a completely different story about Jesus Christ than the gospels do.

And as I said, this is no coincidence, but a clear intention. The councils that compiled the gospels and letters into what we today call the New or Second Testament wanted to preserve this polyphony and deliberately did not summarize the different perspectives into *one* final one!

And so Bill Bright's summary is only *one* of many possible summaries, even if it is perhaps the most plausible for us because of our Reformation and modern-day individualistic background. However, every summary of the Gospel is always an abbreviation and must therefore be measured against what we find in the Bible. Many voices do not mean that anything goes! But there are very different possibilities when you try to say in four to five sentences what the message of Jesus Christ means to you or how you hear it.

With my large international team of young theologians from the UEM member churches on all three continents, I am constantly working to develop new summaries of the good news that are relevant to their respective environments. Here are some examples:

> ***For people seeking a good life:***
>
> 1. *People use all possibilities, including magic, to live a good life.*
> 2. *But in doing so, they are actually seeking God, the Almighty and Loving.*

3. *God provides the true path to a good life: entry into the Kingdom of God.*
4. *Live in this Kingdom: believe in the power of the king and align yourself with it. He will provide everything you need.*
5. *Share this good life with others.*

In interfaith dialogue:

1. *God is the creator and the almighty.*
2. *God has a plan for God's creation.*
3. *God is working to bring peace to the world. (Christians believe that this has already been accomplished through Jesus Christ.)*
4. *God wants to use all people as instruments of peace.*

For marginalized people:

1. *I live because God created me.*
2. *We are valuable because we are God's creatures.*
3. *God is with us and in us.*
4. *Our responsibility: to accept it and live with it. Accepting that we are valuable. Caring for creation. Proclaiming God's presence.*
5. *Our hope: a good life on earth, and eternal life after death.*

If you look closely, you will see that these summaries are not actually dogmatic statements, but each tells a story. And that is important to me: the entire Second Testament does not contain a single book that could be described as dogmatic theology. Even Paul's letter to the Romans, which is often read as such, is a letter, a casual writing. And you quickly notice that when you read it carefully: Paul struggles, searches for words, starts over and over again.

And that is what evangelism is about, the aspect of mission that involves storytelling – it is about telling stories. People are rarely interested in dogmatic statements; but everyone loves stories, especially stories in which they can find themselves. And different people can discover themselves in different stories of the gospels: As people who are healed; as skeptical observers; as challenged listeners; as people who are called out of their previous lives; as those who are unconditionally accepted.

So: hopefully it has become clear that the evangelistic message of Jesus Christ can take on many different forms, depending on the people and situations it encounters. Or, to put it more succinctly: the universal Gospel speaks only dialect. It is universal because it concerns everyone. But it only speaks dialect because it speaks to all people in their respective situations, cultures and languages.

But mission and culture are not only about what we say, but also about how we live as a church. And here, too, a church is only missionary when its everyday community life, its forms of worship and its social organization have an inviting effect on the people in its environment. In Germany, there is much discussion about the fact that the Protestant churches in particular are very much confined to a particular social milieu: in their traditional forms, as well as in many of their so-called fresh expressions, they primarily appeal to *white* people from the middle-class.

In Africa and Asia, I experience a somewhat different discussion: here, the Protestant churches have been trying for several decades to take their traditional culture seriously and to incorporate it. Where they used to sing Western hymns, they now compose songs to traditional melodies and play traditional instruments. However, young people in these churches often see this as a backward-looking approach. They are influenced by a globalizing music and popular culture and

prefer to sing praise and worship. The older members of the church criticize this as a loss of culture.

In my opinion, Pentecostal churches are further ahead than the Protestant churches on this point: in Congo, people sing Afro-pop with Christian lyrics in Lingala, in Hong Kong they sing Christian Cantopop, and in Switzerland they sing Swiss German psalms to blues melodies.

But music is only one aspect of culture. What image of family do churches cultivate? In Germany, singles and single parents complain that they do not feel comfortable in church parishes where the father-mother-child family is the norm. In northern Sumatra, the Christian churches hold weekly house services for which an extended family or several people from the neighborhood gather. But when people move to big cities and live there alone or at most as a nuclear family, these forms no longer fit. And in the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, there is a fierce debate about how to deal with polygamy. The church no longer demands that men who are baptized must send away their second or third wives. But they are not admitted to the Lord's Supper, while women in polygamous relationships are – because they are only married to one man!

Or: How do you deal with your ancestors? Chinese Christians go to the graves of their ancestors at the Qingming Festival, clean and decorate them. But they do not leave food or burn money for the dead – because they do not believe that their ancestors live in a realm of the dead that is connected to the world of the living.

A whole book could easily be filled with examples and descriptions of the problems related to the topic of the Gospel and culture.

Just as there is no such thing as *the* Gospel, there are no fixed cultures into which the Gospel can be inculturated once and for all. Cultures influence each other and change continuously. This means that the question of how the Gospel and culture relate to each other must be asked and answered again and again. There are no timeless answers, only questions that need to be asked again and again:

- What in my culture is strengthened by Biblical experiences and stories?
- What do I have to reject in my culture because of the Biblical experiences and stories?
- And what in my culture could perhaps be transformed and 'baptized'?

The distinction in mission theology between 'proselytism' and 'conversion' is helpful here.[8] Proselytism would be when new Christians have to live their faith exactly as those who invited them to faith do; when those who are new to a church would have to completely conform to those who are already there. Conversion, on the other hand, means: I turn to Jesus Christ on my own (individual or communal) cultural path and follow him. This may look quite different from the people who introduced me to Jesus Christ. And perhaps it will take place in completely new forms that arise alongside the old ones. Or: my new ways of living my faith change the community I have joined after my conversion (this is the model of the Acts of the Apostles).

8 This distinction goes back to the British mission historian Andrew Walls.

One thing is helpful here: Christian 'identity' is no more set in stone than living people are. Identities are fluid. It is no coincidence that being a Christian means *following* Jesus – it's a verb of motion! You *become* a Christian – Christians are pilgrims, people on very different paths towards the Kingdom of God. The paths are not random, because they are aligned with this Kingdom – but it is important not to stop on these paths. And we do not walk these paths individually and alone, but always together with others.

Postcolonial mission therefore means that the still dominant churches of the global North are finally ceasing to try and shape global Christianity in their image. They listen to the people in the Global South just as they listen to the people in the Global North who no longer identify with the Christian faith. They bring what they hear and learn into conversation with the Bible, the document that all Christians have in common. And they trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to renew us, which surprises us all again and again.

Plurality and Mission
A short statement in propositions

Christian identity

1. Being a Christian does not mean believing certain dogmatic statements to be true, but having a living relationship with Jesus Christ that at the same time connects me to the community of those who also follow him.
2. Christian identity arises from the fact that my relationship with Jesus Christ shapes my life and

my coexistence with others. It is never static and complete. The Bible speaks of "following" – this is a dynamic process.

3. The Bible gives us benchmarks for the path of discipleship: love, sincerity, humility, patience, peace.
4. Following Christ means renouncing the other gods that shape my life.
5. Following Christ means renouncing (institutional) self-assertion.

Plurality in the church

6. Because the people who are in relationship with Christ are different, these relationships are different as well. Even the Bible is plural in itself and even contradictory! The unity of the church does not consist in dogmas, but in the fact that it lives in relationship to the one Jesus Christ.
7. Plurality within the church does not mean that anything goes, but that we, out of our relationship with Jesus Christ, repeatedly question each other in love as to whether our faith, life and actions really correspond to the will of Jesus Christ.

Mission

8. Being missionary means: I want others to encounter this Jesus Christ who shapes my life. Because I know: God longs for a relationship with those who do not yet know him.
9. Mission is not the marketing of dogmatic statements that I have to convince others of. Therefore, mission

does not include badmouthing other religions or beliefs.

10. Following Jesus Christ involves sharing God's passion for people. This means loving, respecting and listening to them. Only in this attitude is mission possible.
11. Without dialogue there is no mission, but without a missionary attitude dialogue is not genuine.
12. The goal of mission is not to strengthen our church or to reinforce its social position. The goal of mission is that people follow Jesus Christ. Whether they do so is not in our hands. And how they do so can and may be quite different from how we do.

Plurality

13. Those who follow Christ and share his love for people need not fear plurality. The Holy Spirit and its work are not limited to the church (or even to my particular expression of the church!).

Chapter 9

Postcolonial mission – A brief summary in propositions

In mission theology, every topic is connected to every other topic, and it is difficult to find a really good outline for a book. That is why the following is a summary of what was written above in the form of a series of propositions, but deliberately structured in a different way.

"Christianity is a non-western religion." (Lamin Sanneh)

1. Observations

1. Mission is diffuse. Mission exists as an organized project of churches, and mission simply happens. Mission moves from everywhere to everywhere; everyone can be a giver and everyone can be a receiver.
2. Worldwide, Protestant churches are shrinking, while Pentecostal and charismatic movements and churches are growing rapidly almost everywhere. Base communities

shaped by liberation theology have remained a small minority: *"The base communities chose the poor, and the poor chose the Pentecostal churches."* This means that theological issues that hardly play a role in the global North have become important, especially in the global South: healing, exorcism, prosperity gospel.

3. An increasingly globalized popular culture and a re-construction of traditional identities through culture and religion (e.g. witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa, Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, Islamic fundamentalism) can be found alongside, within and sometimes against each other.

2. Agreements

2.1 Mission is always and first and foremost Missio Dei, God's mission.

1. God's essence is mission. God wants to live in relationship, permanently crossing borders: God creates the world as a counterpart, God chooses Israel to be a blessing for the nations. Jesus Christ also crosses ethnic, cultural and religious borders.
2. God's mission also has the aspect of a battle. God Godself confronts the powers of death that are opposed to God. But this battle is different from how we understand battles: God fights evil by allowing Godself to be overcome by it. The death of Jesus on the cross is the victory of the powers opposed to God. But Christ's resurrection shows that a new life in the power of God is possible beyond the victory of the evil forces.
3. Mission is a dynamic, interactive process. It is not the missionaries who bring the Gospel to the people, but rather

the missionaries discover and interpret God at work in the world together with those who are seeking God (e.g. Peter with Cornelius, Acts 10). In the process, both missionaries and those being missioned change.

"Mission means discovering God at work together with others and participating in the process."

4. Mission aims at conversion, not proselytism. The message is translatable and is appropriated differently in different contexts. Its goal is neither to enlarge (my) church nor to change the world in the direction of the Kingdom of God. Mission means setting an example of the Kingdom of God in community, giving a foretaste of it: people follow Jesus Christ and allow their lives and actions to be transformed.
5. Missionary work is holistic: it includes speaking about the Gospel, acting in a diaconal and political way, but also praying for people. The material and spiritual dimensions of mission must not be separated.
6. Mission means empowerment: The disciples receive authority with their sending (Acts 1:8). The recipients of the message receive authority when they accept it (Mark 16:17). Authority is a spiritual category and has nothing to do with training. It must not be misused to exercise power over others.

2.2 Mission spirituality means rediscovering the Holy Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit also sends and empowers people who have no formal training. This means that the question of mission structures is constantly being raised anew.
2. Missional spirituality rediscovers the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These include, for example, the gifts of healing the sick and exorcism.

3. Mission does not arise from appeals, but from holistic spiritual experience.
4. Missional spirituality needs groups and communities that are open to what God is doing and wants to do, and that do not fence themselves off and seal themselves off. A spirituality that is not missionary is not Christian.

"Those who come closer to God find themselves with the poor."

5. Part of a missional spirituality is the renewal of worship. We need 'liturgies' that give space to the Spirit of God, that discover people as made in God's image, and that anticipate the Kingdom of God in a playful way.

2.3 Mission is relational and therefore contextual and dialogical.

1. Mission requires a precise perception of the respective context. This means we need to ask about political power and powerlessness, about social stratification, about different milieus, about traditional indigenous and globalized new cultures, about high and popular culture.
2. The Gospel is the message about a person, not a package of dogmatic truths. That is why it must be reformulated again and again. The paradigm of "sin-justification" is not the only possible one; today "life in abundance" is perhaps more appropriate.
3. But mission is more than the proclamation of a message. Mission is the entire life of the church in relation to its environment.
4. Dialogue and pro-existence (Christians always understand their lives and mission as also benefitting others) are necessary to develop peaceful coexistence and to formulate one's message in a contextual way.

5. Because mission happens in the relationship between people, it must not be misunderstood instrumentally. Its success is not measured by the number of baptisms or projects, but by whether it is faithful to Jesus' mission.

The last word in this book belongs to an African theologian with a critical outlook:

Polycentric Mission – We are not quite there yet

by Harvey Kwiyani (Liverpool, Great Britain)

Polycentric Mission—usually understood to mean "mission happening from many centres around the world"—has become a key theme in contemporary missiological discourse, especially since the turn of the century. As a term, "polycentric mission" is plausible because it speaks of the possibility of the work of mission involving Christians from all continents, with each of the continents being a centre for mission.

As such, it represents a radical shift from how mission has been done before and how it happens today. A great deal of mission history suggests that mission in the 19th and 20th centuries has been from the West to the rest.

Subsequently, the West, (and, by this, I mean Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) has been the centre of mission. In reality though, non-Western nations have engaged in mission before.

Indeed much of the missionary work in the world has been done by local evangelists and missionaries, even where Europeans and North Americans have been involved. In many African countries for example, Westerners started the spark, but it was local evangelists who fanned it into a flame and carried it to the rest of their communities.

At the centre of the argument for polycentric mission is the suggestion that mission is no longer something that only Western Christians get to do in other parts of the world. Mission in the 21st century must involve all Christians worldwide.

Western countries can no longer be the only centres from which missionaries are sent to other parts of the world. The rising African, Asian, and Latin American missionary movements must also mean we will increasingly see these continents, or at least, some of their cities, emerge as centres of mission.

All this makes sense. It is appropriate for us to anticipate that mission today will reflect the worldwide spread of Christianity itself.

We ought to shift our understanding of mission—and our association of mission with Western Christianity—to appreciate that God has called all followers of Christ to God's mission and they can serve wherever in the world God wills them to minister.

It is appropriate for us to anticipate that mission today will reflect the worldwide spread of Christianity itself

Such a shift is critical because of the racialised foundations of a great deal of the mission strategies of the past five centuries, viz-a-viz white supremacy, manifest destiny and the belief that it was the white man's burden to civilise and Christianise the world.

Consequently, there are quite a few issues that we need to wrestle with as we think of polycentric mission.

Whose centres?

First, I wonder about the language of "multiple centres" itself. Whose centres are these? What makes them centres? What happens at those centres? And, if there are centres, there must be margins.

So, again, who is at those margins? Why are they at the margins? What happens at those margins?

By talking about new centres of mission, it seems likely to me that we are expecting the emerging non-Western mission movements to

be "centred" just like the Western movement was. I hope that they will be decentred (and decentralised).

Their strength will be in their democratised approach to mission. We have seen it in Africa where Christianity has exploded, to a great extent, due to the democratic nature of the ministry of evangelism.

If anything, going by the story of mission in the last two centuries, mission done from centres of societal power can easily collude with human empires and seek to dominate and assimilate those who convert while marginalising those who do not.

We cannot effectively talk about mission in a postcolonial world while replicating colonial structures in other parts of the world.

Whose mission?

Of course, the realities of mission today are such that the West is still the centre, both in finances and theological/missiological leadership. Non-Western missionary movements are indeed emerging, but mission today is still Western.

Yes, South Korea and Brazil are among the leading mission-sending countries and millions of Nigerian Christians have been scattered to all continents, bringing their faith with them.

Yet, Western institutions still define mission for the world. Most of what we read in mission is written by English-speaking Westerners for other Westerners, for their service somewhere in the world, outside the West.

Even books written by non-Western scholars tend to be shaped, to a great extent, by Western theological thought. They fail to use their own cultural resources to help us think about the mission of God in new and exciting ways.

Without making space for and encouraging authentic indigenous missiologies, whatever centres emerge in other parts of the world will only be extensions of their parent centres in the West.

We need new languages

Furthermore, the promise of a true polycentric mission will not happen until we agree that all mission is equal. This means that the mission of God is the same, whether it involves Europeans working in Africa or Africans working in Europe.

Our language must reflect an awareness that the same God who sends Westerners also sends Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans. Our current language that qualifies non-Western mission as "diaspora mission" or "reverse mission" is not justifiable.

We end up with mission as something that Westerners (mostly white people) do in other parts of the world while when black and brown people (from Africa, Asia, and Latin America) engage in in mission in the West, it is not really mission but "diaspora mission" or "reverse mission" which, generally speaking, only involves black and brown people reaching other black and brown people.

If mission were, indeed, polycentric, Western Christians would be ready to work with missionaries from the rest of the world in their cities.

Otherwise, in this polycentric mission discourse, it would appear that Global South missionaries are only welcome on other Global South continents.

Polycentric mission cannot happen when Western Christians believe they are superior or higher than the rest of us. In this century of world Christianity, there should be no second-class missionary.

Any segregation in our missionary movements renders the whole idea of polycentric mission unattainable. How can it be polycentric when it is divided?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am not opposed to polycentric mission. I am just a bit cautious it is too good to be true. Its promises, as far as I see in mission today, are unattainable. We still have a strong Western hegemony in mission that will not be decentred soon.

This hegemony has the financial power to determine much of what happens in mission in other parts of the world.

Mission will be polycentric when the power structures shift and African, Asian, and Latin American Christians can participate in mission in their own ways, using their own resources.

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